



Media, Curricula, & Socioacademics

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Media, Curricula, & Socioacademics

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A thesis presented to the faculty
of the Graduate School of Education of Harvard University
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DEDICATION

To Roger, for whom my heart beats fluffy and black.

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With sincere gratitude, I thank the Anschutz Family Foundation for supporting my research. The right combination of creativity, determination, rigor, and money will surely lead us to leveraging media in ways that benefit teaching and learning across the ages and stages.

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Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation is inspired by the creativity in children's books and films, and by the possibilities for education as they are advancing with modern technology and media.

Research tells us that youth are spending less time reading books and more time watching movies and television, and there is a growing trend in our culture to translate popular kids' books into movies. Given this, I wondered: How can fiction books and their Hollywood film adaptations be leveraged to educate youth? To answer this, I present two papers, both of which explore instructional approaches for using crossmedia (books and film) in middle school classrooms in pursuit of enhancing student engagement and socioacademic success.

In Paper 1, I describe *The Giver Project* and share findings to show how a piloted crossmedia curriculum, called *The Giver Educator's Resource* was implemented in seven sixth-grade classrooms across three states: Colorado, Massachusetts, and North Carolina. Using *The Giver* as a case study, I use teacher interviews and student writing to explore teachers' evaluations of the instructional approaches introduced in that curriculum. My findings indicate that teachers positively evaluate lessons that are enjoyable for students, connect to students' social realities, and synchronistically provide academic and social benefit. Further, teachers prefer lessons that are interactive in nature and allow students to collaboratively write and act out scenes from a book or movie. In Paper 2, I extend my analysis of an activity from *The Giver Educator's Resource* that was most positively reviewed by teachers.

Based on those findings, I introduce an instructional approach called the Storyteller's Literary Arts Workshop (*Storyteller's LAW*). I use teacher interviews, student writing, and classroom-discussion transcripts from *The Giver Project*—juxtaposed with theories of constructionism, research in dialogic instruction, and practices in fanfiction—as a frame for

understanding 1) the socioacademic properties in the Storyteller's LAW and 2) why the approach was so positively evaluated by teachers. The content of this dissertation has implications for the development of future K–12 curricula that utilize entertainment media as a means to bring informal media to formal learning environments.

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Introduction: Background and Context for the Thesis

Media, Curricula, & Socioacademics

After Twelve, age isn't important. Most of us even lose track of how old we are as time passes... What's important is the preparation for adult life.

—Jonas, *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993, Chapter 2)

As a researcher and educator, my interpretation of this quote from Jonas reaffirms my perspective that the educational experiences presented to youth during childhood and adolescence are critical to their development into adulthood. Specifically, I identify two skill domains that are critical for young people to practice: *academic skills* and *social skills*. *Academic Skills* are those that one would typically associate with teaching and learning: reading, writing, mathematics, analytic reasoning, etc. *Social Skills* are those that one typically associates with relationships and social interactions: empathy, perspective taking, compassion, self-awareness, etc. I purposefully use the term *skills* here because I want to underscore my point that knowledge of *content*, or facts (e.g., Who was the 16th President of the United States? What is the symbol for Sodium on the Periodic Table? What is the difference between a megabyte and a gigabyte?), is less important for a person to learn than *skills*, simply because with the adequate skills any person could conceivably seek out and learn any content of interest. However, the instructional approaches I present in this dissertation are founded on my view that the combination of *academic skills* and *social skills* are the building blocks of any promising instructional effort. I introduce the term *socioacademics* to describe instructional approaches designed to promote both synchronistically.

My advocacy for socioacademic curricula is supported by a body of empirical research studies that underscore the importance of viewing social development as an integral component of academic curricula (Jones et al., 2011; Miles & Stipek, 2006; Zins et al., 2004). Numerous curriculum analysts have identified a positive relationship between the promotion of social skills in school and students' academic achievement (CASEL, 2008; Wentzel, 1991; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). Specific emphasis has been placed on the importance of developing curricula that integrate literacy lessons with social development (Jones et al, 2011; Miles & Stipek, 2006). I view literacy as the most critical *academic skill* that one can acquire because reading and writing are competencies that enables an individual to independently expand his or her own universe of knowledge and competencies. Thus, I suggest that socioacademic curricula begin with Language Arts and Literacy.

With support from the Anschutz Foundation, my dissertation explores how a piloted socioacademic curriculum, called *The Giver Educator's Resource*¹, was implemented by seven different sixth-grade teachers across three states (Colorado, Massachusetts, and North Carolina). *The Giver Educator's Resource* offers a series of lessons that connect *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993) book with its film adaptation (The Weinstein Company, 2014). *The Giver Educator's Resource* is founded on the hypothesis that drawing upon multiple forms of entertaining media will serve to draw in the attention of otherwise disengaged learners, and also increase the overall engagement of learners across the entire classroom. As students read the book as a class, they also watch scenes from the film on their classroom's television; at the conclusion of reading the book, students watch the entirety of *The Giver*

¹ *The Giver Project* was funded by The Anschutz Foundation. Members of *The Giver Project* research team include Dr. Robert L. Selman (Principal Investigator), Tracy Elizabeth (Project Manager), and Michelle Dionne (Research Assistant), all from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

movie as a class. All of the lessons within the *The Giver Educator's Resource* were specially designed with properties that develop youths' social *and* academic skills at the same time; as such, our team describes it as a "socioacademic crossmedia curriculum." *The Giver* is an appropriate story to pilot a socioacademic crossmedia approach because it introduces moral and social dilemmas to which its youthful audience can easily relate. The dystopic plot follows Jonas, a twelve-year-old boy who slowly learns that his seemingly utopian community is actually riddled with social ills that include an unjust dictatorship, political dishonesty, acts of infanticide, and a culture of murder in the name of order. As this dissertation will expound, *The Giver Educator's Resource* is a piloted curriculum that is used as case study to explore how the instructional approaches within it could affect teaching and learning in middle school Language Arts classrooms. The curriculum was designed with hope that its instructional properties could be adopted for use with other stories and media.

In this dissertation, I present two papers: The first paper is one that I planned for, in the sense that I followed a traditional research approach to collect and analyze data. The second is one that I did plan for; its contents surfaced as an undeniably interesting instructional approach that I felt inspired to explore. In the traditionally-structured research study that I present in Paper 1, I pose the following simple, yet important research questions: Which curriculum activities do teachers describe *favorably*, and why? Which curriculum activities do teachers describe *unfavorably*, and why? To answer these, I draw upon semi-structured interviews, supplemented by student writing samples, to explore teachers' evaluations of the instructional approaches introduced in the curriculum. My findings indicate that teachers positively evaluate lessons that are enjoyable for students, connect to students' social realities, and provide both academic and social benefit.

Teachers negatively evaluate activities that are not enjoyable for students, introduce sensitive subject matter, provide insufficient background knowledge, and require additional preparation beyond what the teacher initially expected. Further, teachers largely prefer curricular lessons that are interactive in nature and allow students to collaboratively write and act out extended scenes from a book or movie. These findings have implications for the development of future curricula that utilize entertainment media as a means to bring informal learning experiences to formal learning environments.

However, the finding from this first study that personally intrigued me the most was that a specific sequence of lessons was almost unanimously beloved by the majority of teachers and students who participated in *The Giver Project*. Driven by curiosity and aspirations to develop highly engaging and effective curricula for youth, I was compelled to carefully analyze this sequence of positively reviewed lessons from *The Giver Educator's Resource*. That analysis is the subject for the second paper that I present in this dissertation. In Paper 2, I introduce what I call the "Storyteller's Literary Arts Workshop (*Storyteller's LAW*).” First, I present teacher interviews, student writing samples, and transcripts of classroom discussions to demonstrate how this curricular innovation was implemented in seven sixth-grade Language Arts classrooms. Next, I draw upon theories of constructionism, research in dialogic instruction, and practices in fanfiction as a frame for rationalizing why the Storyteller's LAW was so positively evaluated by teacher and students. Based on my understanding of these theories, as they relate to how the Storyteller's LAW was implemented in practice, I assert the following theory of learning for the Storyteller's LAW: *If students engage in both independent and collaborative creative efforts, in ways that allow them to make connections across a variety of media platforms, as learners, they will 1) be*

more authentically engaged in the learning process, 2) practice valuable social and academic competencies, and 3) become more critical consumers of entertainment media.

The contents of my dissertation present innovative curriculum-designs that merge multiple forms of popular media into a single learning environment. The findings presented in both papers have implications for how educators can use both new and old media to enhance socioacademic learning and authentic student engagement in their classrooms. This exemplar instructional approach has the potential to powerfully engage students in educational processes that benefit their academic, social, *and* media literacy competencies.

Study 1—Books, Movies, & Adolescents: A Case Study of Middle School Teachers' Implementations of a Crossmedia Curriculum

Abstract

In this article, I investigate sixth-grade teachers' implementation of a crossmedia curriculum in seven English Language Arts classrooms. I draw upon semi-structured interviews, supplemented by student writing samples, to explore teachers' evaluations of the instructional approaches introduced in the curriculum. My findings indicate that teachers positively evaluate lessons that are enjoyable for students, connect to students' social realities, and provide both academic and social benefit. Teachers negatively evaluate activities that are not enjoyable for students, introduce sensitive subject matter, provide insufficient background knowledge, and require additional preparation beyond what the teacher initially expected. Further, teachers largely prefer curricular lessons that are interactive in nature and allow students to collaboratively write and act out extended scenes from a book or movie. These findings have implications for the development of future curricula that utilize

entertainment media as a means to bring informal learning experiences to formal learning environments.

Introduction

Today's youth are consumers of both "old media" (printed books or newspapers, radio, television, and movies) and "new media" (the internet, computers, tablets, mobile devices, (Jenkins, 2006). However, television shows and movies are still popular forms of entertainment, and there is evidence that—with the proliferation of new media technologies—children and adolescents are consuming these "old" media in new ways (Common Sense Media, 2016; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; Rideout, Vandewater, & Wartella, 2003). On an average day, tweens (ages 8–12) spend about six hours consuming entertainment media that include television, movie, and internet screen content viewed purely for "fun" purposes (Common Sense Media, 2016). In fact, the phenomenon is so widely acknowledged that adolescents in this generation have been nicknamed "screenagers," to emphasize the amount of time they spend focused on a screen (Rushkoff, 2006). This is viewed as problematic by some parents and educators who have expressed concern that television and movies steal time from quality learning (Barry & Murphy, 2014; Elmore, 2010). And, as if to underscore adults' concerns about screen time, studies have also found that the average amount of time youth spend on reading print materials is decreasing (Common Sense Media, 2014). In other words, youths' time spent watching TV and movies has increased while their time spent reading books has decreased. In addition, it has become commonplace for production companies to adapt books into motion pictures. While verifying the educational merit of the books themselves is outside of the scope of this project, the practice of translating books to film causes one to wonder: What educational value, if any, are the screen versions of these stories bringing to youth?

Simply incorporating film into instruction is not a new concept. For years, educators have employed film studies to teach a variety of content, including leadership skills (English & Steffy, 1997), medicine (Alexander, Pavlov, & Lenahan, 2007), foreign policy (Kuzma & Haney, 2001), historical inquiry (Woelders, 2007), and citizenship (Russell & Waters, 2010). However, developing a curriculum that is specifically designed to bridge an entertaining (fiction-based) book and its movie adaptation *is* a novel concept. This innovation is promoted by media experts who argue that incorporating multiple modes of media into curricula will enhance students' literacy skills (Johnson & Kress, 2003; Siegel, 2012) as well as their sense of civic and ethical responsibility (Jenkins, 2009; Myers-Lipton, 1998). Additionally, encountering a popular culture version of a phenomenon (e.g., music artists, actors, video games) leads to interest in reading about it. For example, education researchers have found that, "based on their interest in a particular music artist, students would read biographies, look up the artist's lyrics, and visit the artist's web page" (Birr Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008, pp. 137–138).

Despite recommendations to incorporate informal educative media into formal learning environments, no empirical studies have yet been conducted to explore what instructional strategies of that kind would look like in practice. One approach for understanding how a crossmedia curriculum could promote learning in classrooms is to study teachers' reflections on their experiences implementing a pilot crossmedia curriculum. *The Giver Educator's Resource* (Selman & Elizabeth, 2014) is a useful case for this exploration because it is a crossmedia curriculum that consists of instructional strategies carefully designed to bolster adolescents' academic skills and social skills through the shared narrative

of *The Giver* book and film². This particular story is rich with themes of social and civic dilemmas that challenge students' sense of ethics and social responsibility. The book version has been assigned a Lexile score of 760L (MetaMetrics, 2016), which roughly translates to 4th–5th grade reading level, yet is identified by the American Library Association (2016) as a “timeless classic with widespread teen appeal” that is read in middle and elementary schools. In this paper, I present *The Giver Educator's Resource* as a case example for crossmedia curricula; however, the instructional strategies within this curriculum can be applied to other stories and media formats.

² *The Giver* book by Lois Lowry (1993); film by The Weinstein Company & Walden Media (2014). *The Giver* was added to the “Best Books for Young Adults” list and awarded a Newbery Medal for outstanding literature by the ALA in 1994 (Random House, n.d.).

Theory and Empirical Research

An Argument for Crossmedia Approach

The analysis I present here focuses on the value of delivering content to children through a variety of media formats, a phenomenon often referred to as **crossmedia** by media scholars. This study seeks to analyze the implementation of this instructional approach and its value as an educational vehicle. Moloney (2014) states that while “multimedia makes use of the different affordances of media form, crossmedia makes use of the different affordances of media channel” (para. 8). *The Giver Educator’s Resource* presented in this study advocates for the exposure of children to both the book and movie form of the same content, in this case *The Giver*, as a crossmedia curriculum because the resource examines one story (*The Giver*) presented over multiple channels (book and film). The pedagogical goals of *The Giver Educator’s Resource* are 1) to engage students through the use of dynamic storytelling and interactive lessons, 2) to supplement students’ literacy education by offering reading and writing activities, and 3) to stimulate students’ ethical reflection by asking them to contemplate a series of social and moral dilemmas that are presented in the story (Selman & Elizabeth, 2014).

Theorists have suggested that the inclusion of fiction entertainment film in curricula—as opposed to traditional documentaries and deliberative education videos—is an effective way to capture students’ engagement and interest (Berk, 2009). Berk draws upon neuroscience to advocate that using movies for instruction will lead to valuable learning outcomes that include “grabbing students’ attention,” “drawing on students’ imagination,” “making learning fun,” and “decreasing anxiety and tension on scary topics” (2009, p. 2). In an effort to bolster students’ academic engagement, *The Giver Educator’s Resource* offers a

series of lessons that connect *The Giver* book with its film. As students progress through the book, they also watch scenes from the film in their classrooms³. At the conclusion of reading the book, students watch the entirety of *The Giver* movie as a class.

Beyond bolstering student engagement, *The Giver Educator's Resource* introduces instructional approaches aimed to promote students' academic and social competencies. We use the term *socioacademic* to describe a learning experience that attends to youths' academic skills (basic literacy, vocabulary, grammar, content comprehension, critical thinking, etc.) and social skills (empathy, self-awareness, perspective-taking, kindness, etc.) at the same time. Despite cautions from social-development researchers and theorists (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004; Jones, Brown, Hoglund, & Aber, 2010), many curriculum designers consider social and academic competencies to be independent of each other. As a result, students tend to be exposed to fragmented curricula that heavily focus on academic skills with only a smattering of isolated lessons on social development throughout the week (Elizabeth & Selman, 2012). To address this concern, all of the instructional strategies within the *The Giver Educator's Resource* were specially designed with socioacademic properties.

The Giver is an appropriate story to pilot a socioacademic crossmedia approach because it introduces moral and social dilemmas to which its youthful audience can easily relate. The dystopic plot follows Jonas, a twelve-year-old boy who slowly learns that his seemingly utopian community is actually riddled with social ills that include an unjust dictatorship, political dishonesty, acts of infanticide, and a culture of murder in the name of order. *The Giver* also offers occasions for youth to contemplate family and peer relationships, the structure of communities and laws, the value of diversity, and strategies for handling

³ To account for those schools with limited resources, the movie scenes that child would typically watch are also included as text excerpts of the screenplay that are embedded into the actual curriculum document.

conflict. *The Giver Educator's Resource* encourages students to question their own ethical values (Tirri, Nokelainen, & Holm, 2008) as they watch Jonas interpret dilemmas, solve conflicts, and navigate consequences throughout the story.

Teacher Voice is Needed to Understand the Use of Crossmedia Curricula in Classrooms

Can crossmedia curricula fulfill the promise to enhance learning in classrooms as some advocates have warranted? (Berk, 2009; Johnson & Kress, 2003; Siegel, 2012). Media researchers and theorists have encouraged educators to modify instruction to complement the changing landscape of youth media consumption by incorporating multiple forms of media into the classroom (Jenkins, 2009; Jenkins, 2010; Kajder, 2010). However, in my review of existing empirical research, I have found the voices of teachers in this conversation to be conspicuously limited. Given the innovative approach prototyped by *The Giver Educator's Resource* to incorporate the shared narrative of a book and film into a single curriculum, it is important to understand how teachers might critique such a strategy. What insights could teachers offer to enhance the overall curricular content and quality? Furthermore, what would implementation of these instructional approaches concretely look like in practice?

Many education researchers recommend that curriculum designers solicit teacher perspectives and consultation when developing educational lessons and activities. Articulated well by Schwartz (2006), “the crux of the problem around the role and use of curriculum guides lies in a failure to distinguish between two distinct target groups for the guides: curriculum users and curriculum receivers” (pp. 449–450). Typically, curricula are created with the receivers, or students, in mind with little consideration for how the users, or teachers, of these guides will interpret the materials (Carl, 2005). Schwartz (2006) explains why this is problematic:

Teachers are seen [by curriculum developers] as taking their materials and making them ‘practical’. However, curriculum writers cannot expect to relate to the teacher’s classroom experience...What happens in the learning experience is an outcome of the original, creative, thinking-on-your-feet efforts of the teacher—which often lead

the class in directions far, far away from the anticipated goals of the curriculum writers. (p. 450)

Positioning teachers as mere ‘receivers’ of curricula that were developed by outside ‘specialists’ creates potential for teacher dissatisfaction of the materials (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Dane & Schneider, 1988), variance in curriculum implementation (O’Donnell, 2008), and a curricular failure to achieve intended student-learning outcomes (Schwartz, 2006). One way to increase the likelihood that a curriculum will achieve the goals of its writers is to solicit teachers’ input during the design process (Carl, 2005; Carl 2009; Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). This suggestion is supported by studies that have demonstrated that drawing upon teacher expertise in the development of education curricula leads to increased consistency of curriculum implementation and greater overall teacher satisfaction with curricular materials (O’Donnell, 2008). In response to these concerns, my dissertation will approach teachers not as “participants” to be evaluated but as “consultants” who can offer their expertise to guide the refinement of an English Language Arts curriculum.

Study Design & Methodology

The data for this study were drawn from a year-long research project, *The Giver Project*,⁴ conducted by a team of researchers as an exploratory study designed to generate insight into sixth graders’ social, ethical, and civic understandings, as well as to experiment with how books and film can be united to enhance teaching and learning. We conducted the study to analyze factors related to teachers’ critiques of activities presented by *The Giver*

⁴ *The Giver Project* was funded by The Anschutz Foundation. Members of *The Giver Project* research team include Dr. Robert L. Selman (Principal Investigator), Tracy Elizabeth (Project Manager), and Michelle Dionne (Research Assistant), all from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Educator's Resource and to understand educators' rationales for preferring some activities to others. Treating the curriculum and 7 teachers who piloted it as a case study (Yin, 2003), the research I present in this paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Which curriculum activities do teachers describe favorably, and why?
2. Which curriculum activities do teachers describe unfavorably, and why?

Given the goals of the study, our research team adopted a qualitative analytic approach to capture teachers' impressions of the utility of the curriculum. Using *The Giver Educator's Resource* as a common variable across the multiple-case study (Merriam, 1998), this study's purpose was to generate a preliminary understanding of how teachers view this type of curriculum as supporting student learning in Language Arts classrooms. In the following sections, I describe our recruitment process, our participant pool, and how we collected and analyzed our data.

Recruitment

The Giver Project employed a three-step method for recruiting participants. We sought sixth-grade English Language Arts teachers who were willing to implement *The Giver Educator's Resource* in their classrooms. First, we conducted purposeful sampling (Patton, 2005; Suri, 2011) by sending a formal email about the project to 10 school administrators with whom we had previous professional relationships (See Appendix D for wording that was included in the initial recruitment emails). Within this step we also used a snowball recruitment method (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) by asking the administrators to forward our letter on to their colleagues. Four school-district personnel replied with interest in participating in the project. We asked each of those 4 administrators to email the project description to all of the sixth-grade English Language Arts teachers within their districts. We then prioritized the first teachers who replied with interest to our call as participants in the

study, given they met our selection criteria. In conclusion, *The Giver Project* recruited a total of 7 teachers who represented 4 school districts across 3 states (Colorado, Massachusetts, and North Carolina).

Participants

There were 6 public schools and 1 private school in our sample; four schools identified as Title I, which means they received specialized government funds because a large percentage of their students were from low-income families. All 7 of the teachers in *The Giver Project* were white, native-English speaking females who ranged in age from 26–58 years old. They all taught sixth-grade English Language Arts classes. Table 1 contains additional characteristics about each teacher and the school in which she taught. While each of these teachers taught multiple classes of students throughout the day, we randomly selected one class per teacher to be identified as an “official” study class, meaning that class was the only one from which we would systematically collect data. The student sample (N = 161) in the 7 study classrooms collectively represented a range of ethnicities: White (54%), Latino (15.2%), Asian (5.3), Black (4.2), and Native American (4%)⁵. Six classrooms were comprised of mixed learning-ability groupings, and 1 teacher described her class as containing predominately exceptional children who had been classified as having specific learning or linguistic challenges. Students’ gender was evenly split between females (51%) and males (49%), and their ages ranged from 10–13 years old with an average of 11 years.

⁵ For *The Giver Project*, our research team collected student demographic information through the study consent forms. Several students indicated “Other” (12.1%) or chose not to respond (4.8%) to the ethnicity question.

Table 1
Demographic Information for Teacher Participants and Schools⁶

Teacher	Franco	Levine	Thomas	Wells	Moore	Greene	O'Hara
School	Rocky Creek	Rocky Creek	Cedarland	Angels	Coastal Pines	Roosevelt	Hamilton
School Type	public	public	public	public	private	public	public
Community Type	Urban Fringe	Urban Fringe	Rural	Urban Fringe	Suburban	Urban	Urban
State	CO	CO	CO	CO	NC	MA	MA
Years of Experience	4	3	6	8	24	15	2
Age	40	26	48	32	57	58	31
Study Class Size	25	24	25	28	22	18	19
Great School Rating	2	2	4	6	n/a	8	9
Title One	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no

Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

Our research team asked the participating teachers to implement *The Giver Educator's Resource*⁷ during the fall semester of 2014. The teachers' implementation ranged from 3–5 weeks, with an average of 4 weeks to reach completion. This study specifically draws from interviews with the teachers. However, during this time, we gathered an assortment of

⁶ All teacher participants and corresponding schools have been assigned pseudonyms.

⁷ *The Giver Educator's Resource* can be downloaded for free online via the Walden Media website.

additional data in the form of student writing samples, whole-class interviews, and classroom discussion transcripts. Using *The Giver Educator's Resource* as a guide for framing our questions, we conducted semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006; Stake, 2010) with each of the seven teachers once about her overall experience implementing the curriculum. We also borrowed McNamara's (2009) suggestions for conducting rigorous semi-structured interviews in a conversational tone as a guide for conducting our interviews with the teachers. According to McNamara (2009), this approach is designed "to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee" and "provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee" (Types of Interviews, para. 2). Appendix E presents the full interview protocol. Each interview was guided by two opening questions: "*Of these curricular activities, which did you prefer over others?*" and "*What modifications did you make and why?*" During this process, I provided each teacher with a copy of the curriculum as a reference point to aid her when reflecting upon each activity. These interviews ranged from 30–50 minutes long, for an average of approximately 40 minutes each. For ease of analysis, we audio recorded all 7 of the interviews and later transcribed the files.

Student Writing

We gathered student writing samples from 11 prompts that were embedded directly into *The Giver Educator's Resource*. These prompts—inspired by research on open-ended questioning patterns that promote perspective-taking (Selman, 2003; Wentzel, Filisetti, & Loony, 2007), prosocial collaboration (Elizabeth, 2014), civic reflection (Adler & Goggin, 2005), analytic reasoning (Resnick, Michaels, & O'Connor, 2010), and academic language (Snow & Uccelli, 2009; Duhaylongsod, Snow, Selman, & Donovan, 2015)—were designed to elicit students' thoughts on ethical dilemmas that originate in the story of *The Giver* but

could also potentially be encountered in real life. We collected copies of all the writing samples completed by students in our 7 “official” study classes for each of the 11 writing-based activities presented in the curriculum.

Data Analysis – A Series of Three Phases to Interpreting Interview Data

Our research team applied a comprehensive, three-phase methodological approach to analyzing our interview data: 1) Thematic Coding, 2) Member Checks, and 3) Grounded Theory. The purpose of these sequential processes was to reduce researcher bias, enhance coding reliability, and generate a sophisticated understanding of teachers’ curricular evaluations.

Phase One, Thematic Coding⁸

In order to initially organize our data, we applied a thematic coding process designed to categorize interview excerpts according to our specific research objectives (Creswell, Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). To alleviate researcher biases and to avoid faulty categorization of our data, we gathered a group of 3 researchers to individually code each of the 7 interviews based on the following categories:

Category 1. Identify utterances or sections of the text where the teacher is offering a *positive* evaluation of a curricular activity or indicates that she would be willing to teach the activity again.

Category 2. Identify utterances where the teacher is offering a *negative* evaluation of a curricular activity or indicates that she would be reluctant to teach the activity again.

Category 3. Classify utterances based on the activity number(s) to which the teacher is specifically referring.

⁸ We used Dedoose, a cloud-hosted mixed-methods analysis platform, to store, organize, and code all data in this study.

This process of consensus coding helped us to confirm excerpts in each interview where teachers were addressing a specific curricular activity (See Appendix A for the “CODEBOOK by Activity Type”) and decide if teachers were generally offering a positive or negative evaluation of the activity. Identifying excerpts in the data where teachers discussed specific curricular activities proved to be instrumental later in our analyses when our research team searched for the co-occurrence of codes across the data. For example, we were able to generate a report that tallied—and provided a comprehensive list of—all positive rationales teachers identified as being associated with Activity 3, a personal writing exercise. After coding all data individually, our research group reconvened to discuss how our coding aligned and to reconcile any discrepancies or disagreements we made in the assignment of codes. For any coding that was unclear or difficult for our team to agree upon, we made a note of our question and highlighted that content to be addressed in *Phase Two*.

Phase Two, Member Checks

The second phase in our analytic process was to conduct member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) to determine if our research team’s interpretation of feedback regarding the critiques of the curriculum accurately captured the teachers’ intentions. To achieve this, we prepared memos for each teacher that summarized our interpretations of her reflections regarding each curricular activity and highlighted all lingering clarifying questions posed by our researchers. We emailed each teacher her personalized memo along with a copy of her transcribed interview, and then invited the teachers to confirm, deny, or elaborate upon the content captured in those summaries. Of the 7 participating teachers, two made additional comments and requests for minor corrections. Based on our participants’ feedback, our team then modified our coding to best reflect the teachers’ clarified perspectives.

Phase Three, Grounded Theory

In the third phase of our analysis, we applied a grounded theory approach to more deeply understand the categories introduced in *Phase One*. This iterative process involved a series of steps including open coding, frequent comparing of codes, axial coding, writing memos, conducting inter-rater reliability, and developing a codebook (Miles & Huberman, 2002). The purpose was to garner a sophisticated understanding of teachers' rationales for their evaluations of the curricular activities (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). This process allowed me to develop a theoretical frame that rationalizes not just *how*, but *why* teachers identify some curricular activities as more favorable than others.

Corbin and Strauss (2014) describe two major levels of coding: open coding and axial coding. When beginning *Phase Three* of this analysis, a research assistant and I individually engaged in the process of open coding by perusing the raw interview data and generating a catch-all list of concepts associated with the rationales teachers tended to provide along with their critiques of the curriculum. Next, we engaged in the process of axial coding by comparing our individual lists of open codes and then generating a single list of codes that overlapped or were most prevalent in the data. During this process, we were able to relate our axial categories (teachers' rationales for judging an activity) to our basic thematic codes from *Phase One* (teachers' evaluation for or against an activity). Using our unified list of axial codes as the platform for our developing theoretical framework, we worked together to code several excerpts of randomly selected text from the interviews. Our goal with this process (Boyatzis, 1998) was to generate concise codes that authentically captured the intent conveyed in our data. For example, we originally created two separate codes—*school mission* and *greater curriculum*—that both encompassed teachers' praises when a curricular activity aligned with the greater educational goals of her school. After attempting to assign these

codes to excerpts in our data, we quickly learned that we were double-coding the same utterances. Thus, we merged the two to create a single *school mission* code that more comprehensively netted the core idea that we were interested in examining.

After merging overlapping codes and eliminating codes that were superfluous or underused, I generated a codebook (See Appendix B) to illustrate the definitions of and examples for the primary codes in our grounded theory (MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, & Milstein, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994) that summarizes teachers' rationales for evaluating this curriculum.⁹ Using this codebook, the research assistant and I, who were at this point thoroughly familiar with the codebook and coding process, engaged in an inter-rater reliability exercise where we each coded approximately 50% of the entire interview data set.

Using the Dedoose analytic software, we separately coded every odd-numbered page of the interview data. Our rationale for this process was that teachers tended to discuss activities in the sequential order in which the curriculum presented those lessons; thus, to ensure that we coded a balance of all activity evaluations, we needed to review a sample that examined each interview from start to finish. As shown in Appendix F, our inter-rater reliability process yielded a pooled Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.92, with a range of 0.78–1.00 (Cohen, 1960) across individual codes. Based on these high agreements, I proceeded to code the entirety of our interview data.

Results

While many interesting themes emerged from this analysis, the results reported here focus on those themes that 1) are most saliently represented by our data and 2) are directly

⁹ MacQueen et al. (1998) traditionally suggest that codebooks present of 6 facets for each code (code name, brief definition, extended definition, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, and examples from the data); however, in this study, I have structured our codebook using 3 facets (code name, full definition, and an example from the data).

relevant to our research focus to identify curricular lessons most favorably evaluated by teachers. During the teacher interviews, we found that the majority of the discussions (74%) were consumed by teacher utterances that can be classified as evaluations of the crossmedia lessons and their rationales for making those judgments.¹⁰ As shown in Table 2, teachers discussed the *Interactive* activities most frequently throughout our interviews (43%), followed by the *Writing* activities (20%), and finally the *Perspective Taking* Activities (11%). Across the sample of teachers, there was an even distribution of positive ($n = 100$) and negative ($n = 99$) rationales for evaluating an activity. The interview excerpts that addressed the *Interactive* activities were predominately associated with positive teacher evaluations (64% of the excerpts); the *Writing* activities had a balance of both positive (53%) and negative (51%) evaluations; and the *Perspective Taking* activities were predominately associated with negative evaluations (68%).

Table 2
Type of Curricular Activity by Frequency Coded and Evaluated

260 Total Excerpts Coded in the Total Dataset.	Code Frequency in Dataset	POSITIVE Evaluation Evaluation Count ÷ Code Frequency	NEGATIVE Evaluation
INTERACTIVE	43% (112)	64% (75)	45% (50)
DISCUSSION & DEBATE	24% (63)	60% (38)	57% (36)
SCRIPT WRITING & ROLE PLAYING	20% (51)	76% (39)	27% (14)
PERSONAL WRITING	20% (53)	53% (28)	51% (27)
PERSPECTIVE TAKING	11% (28)	25% (7)	68% (19)

¹⁰ Out of the 260 total interview excerpts coded in our dataset, 189 were coded as containing a teacher evaluation, either positive or negative, of the curricular activities (with 20 overlapping positive and negative excerpts).

A more nuanced exploration into our results shows that of the 189 excerpts coded as containing a teacher evaluation, there is a balanced proportion of negative and positive evaluations represented in the dataset. Put differently, teachers spent the same amount of time praising activities (53%) as they did criticizing activities (52%). Table 3 presents the most commonly coded teacher rationales for assigning both positive and negative judgments to an activity. We can see that what tends to matter most to the teachers is their perception of their students' judgments of a lesson; if the students were pleased, then the teachers were also pleased.

Table 3

Teacher Rationales for Positive and Negative Evaluations of All Curricular Activities

		Code Frequency (<i>n</i>)	# of Teachers Cited
+ POSITIVE Evaluation (<i>n</i> = 100)	STUDENT ENJOYMENT	66	7/7
	ACADEMIC BENEFIT	30	5/7
	SOCIAL BENEFIT	23	6/7
	CONNECTED TO REAL LIFE	18	6/7
	SCHOOL MISSION	4	3/7
	EASY TO TEACH	4	4/7
- NEGATIVE Evaluation (<i>n</i> = 99)	STUDENT DISCONTENTMENT	25	7/7
	SENSITIVE SUBJECT	24	6/7
	INSUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE	23	6/7
	REQUIRED PREPARATION	21	4/7
	LACKS PURPOSE OR RATIONALE	10	3/7
	TIMING IS OFF	10	2/7
	DISCONNECTED FROM REAL LIFE	4	1/7

The most popular lessons, yet also those with the most polarized teacher evaluations, were those we identified as *Interactive* activities (i.e., any lesson that employed dialogic or collaborative strategies). Thus, we more closely analyzed the ways in which those activities were described during the interviews. As shown in Table 5, other than the teachers' concerns for *The Giver's* sensitive subject matter (22%) that was sometimes addressed in the *Interactive* activities, the teachers' comments describing how much students enjoyed those lessons

(42%), as well as the social (20%) and academic (18%) benefits associated with those lessons, notably represented teachers' predominately positive evaluations.

Table 4
Teacher Rationales for Evaluations of the Interactive Activities

*115 Total Interactive Evaluations were Coded, with 10 Overlapping Excerpts.		
+ POSITIVE Evaluation (<i>n</i> = 75)		Code Frequency
	STUDENT ENJOYMENT	<i>n</i> = 48, 42%
	SOCIAL BENEFIT	<i>n</i> = 20, 17%
	ACADEMIC BENEFIT	<i>n</i> = 18, 16%
	CONNECTED TO REAL LIFE	<i>n</i> = 8, 7%
	EASY TO TEACH	<i>n</i> = 3, 3%
	SCHOOL MISSION	<i>n</i> = 2, 2%
- NEGATIVE Evaluation (<i>n</i> = 50)	SENSITIVE SUBJECT	<i>n</i> = 22, 19%
	REQUIRED PREPARATION	<i>n</i> = 8, 7%
	TIMING IS OFF	<i>n</i> = 8, 7%
	LACKS PURPOSE OR RATIONALE	<i>n</i> = 6, 5%
	DISCONNECTED FROM REAL LIFE	<i>n</i> = 6, 5%
	INSUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE	<i>n</i> = 6, 5%
	STUDET DISCONTENTMENT	<i>n</i> = 3, 3%

Discussion

This discussion will focus on the types of activities (*Perspective Taking*, *Personal Writing*, and *Interactive*) that teachers evaluated, with particular attention to the *Interactive* activities because those were most frequently discussed by teachers. However, to preface that

discussion, we will briefly define and offer examples for the four rationales that teachers most commonly cited as associated with their positive activity evaluations.

Teacher Rationales for Positive Evaluations of All Curricular Activities

Student Enjoyment

As shown in Table 4, all of the teachers in our study cited **student enjoyment** ($n = 66$ comments, 66%) most frequently when positively evaluating a curricular activity. These findings are intriguing because they suggest that teachers recognize that students' enjoyment of school activities has educational value (DiCarlo, 2009; Larson & Richards, 1991). Our team assigned the code STUDENT ENJOYMENT to any statement in which the teacher reported that her students appeared to experience happiness or fun when engaged in the activity. An example of the application of this code can be found in our interview with Mrs. Thomas, who described her students' enjoyment of a *Scriptwriting & Role Playing* activity: *When they wrote it out and acted it out, they loved the time to write it out. And then, of course, the one girl wrote a full thing. I was like, "How did you do this?" This whole play came out!*

Academic Benefit

Five of the teachers in our interviews cited an **academic benefit** ($n = 30$ comments, 30%) for students as a rationale for positively evaluating a curricular activity. Given that teachers' primary role as educators is to ensure that students receive and retain academic knowledge, our team was unsurprised by this finding. We applied the code ACADEMIC BENEFIT to any statement in which the teacher described the activity to be associated with an academic or education-related benefit to her students (e.g., content comprehension, articulation of arguments, writing improvement, ELL involvement, critical thinking, providing evidence, using counter-examples, etc.). An example of the application of this

code can be found in our interview with Ms. O'Hara, who described the educational merits of a *Scriptwriting & Role Playing* activity and how it met her school's academic objectives:

They have to think about character motivations and there's character analysis in it, so they have to think about why would a character do this. And this flows into settings. They have to consider setting, which we've been talking about a lot in our class...There's speaking and listening objectives that they're meeting. Using their voice to show emotion, that was one of our objectives one of our days.

Social Benefit

Six teachers cited a **social benefit** ($n = 23$ comments, 23%) for students as a rationale for positively evaluating a curricular activity. We found this rationale to be timely, given that students' social interactions and well-being in schools has been recently highlighted among education researchers as an effective way to bolster a positive school culture and students' academic performance (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). We assigned the code SOCIAL BENEFIT to any statement in which the teacher judged the activity as promoting an individual student's social growth or a whole-class climate related outcome (e.g., enhanced students perspective taking, kindness, friendships, peer trust, peer collaboration, etc.). An example of the application of this code can be found in our interview with Ms. O'Hara, who also described the peer-relationship-building merits of a *Scriptwriting & Role Playing* activity:

I think it really make them feel confident with one another. It set the tone nicely...You know, we just kinda sat back. They know to call on peers and know to build off of one another's ideas. It really set the tone for me moving on, now the kids already feel comfortable being in front of one another or sharing their thoughts that way.

Connected to Real Life

Six teachers cited a student **connection to real life** ($n = 18$ comments, 18%) as a rationale for positively evaluating an activity. This rationale is consistent with the findings of

other curriculum studies that suggest student engagement and learning motivation is bolstered when students feel like they can relate to the subject matter (Axelson & Flick, 2010). We assigned the code CONNECTION TO REAL LIFE to any statement in which the teacher described the activity as appreciated by students specifically because they were able to make connections between the curricular content and their social realities. An example of the application of this code can be found in our interview with Ms. Wells, who highlighted the ways in which students personally identified with a *Personal Writing* activity:

I think because they all play war, in a sense, and they all play those video games and watch those television shows. And then to see it from Jonas' point of view, because they also have never been in a war scene, they don't see it, right? ... They just really got into it. And then, immediately, it was, "Oh, it's not the same. Of course kids can play war." And I said, "How do you think a soldier back from Afghanistan feels when he sees kids doing that?" And they were like, "Oh, I never even thought about that." That was kind of cool.

Teacher Rationales for Negative Evaluations of the Instructional Activities

Student Discontentment

As shown in Table 3, all 7 of the teachers in our study cited **student discontentment** ($n = 25$ comments, 25%) most often when negatively evaluating a curricular activity. This finding, which could be interpreted as the inverse of student enjoyment, is interesting because it suggests that students' dissatisfaction with curricular activities is associated with diminished learning motivation (Axleson & Flick, 2010; DiCarlo, 2009; Larson & Richards, 1991), and an overall stressful teaching environment for educators (Blase, 1986). Our team applied the code STUDENT DISCONTENTMENT to any statement in which the teacher reported that her students did not like the activity. An

example of the application of this code can be found in our interview with Mrs. Moore, who described her students' lack of enthusiasm for a *Perspective Taking* exercise:

Yeah, and a lot of my students just didn't like it. They said, "Yeah, we know what you want me to say." It's like the students can either tell us what we want to hear, or sound like a psycho killer or a bully—even if they are not a bully—they didn't want to go there.

Sensitive Subject

Six teachers cited a **sensitive subject** ($n = 24$ comments, 24%) as a rationale for negatively evaluating a curricular activity. Our research team anticipated this finding, given that *The Giver* addresses a spectrum of potentially uncomfortable topics including bathing the elderly, infanticide, adolescent sexual urges, abuse of government power, and euthanasia, reasons that numerous school districts across the United States have banned it from their reading lists (Walden Media, 2012). Our team assigned the code SENSITIVE SUBJECT to any teacher expression of discomfort or reluctance about story content, particularly if she cited this discomfort as a rationale for why she hesitated to teach a lesson or opted out of the activity altogether. An example of the application of this code can be found in our interview with Ms. Wells, who disclosed that she had contacted her school's guidance counselor before teaching an *Interactive* debate activity:

So I said [to the guidance counselor], "We're running a debate. The person asked to be 'released,' but the implication to the reader is that they are committing suicide or being killed by the Community. Are there any tips you can give as to how to approach this? I want to focus the debate on whether it was committing suicide or not, not whether committing suicide is good or bad. Are there any key words I should stay away from or tell you about if I hear?"

Given the prevalence in this study of teachers' concern for sensitive subject matter introduced in *The Giver* story and in our Educator's Resource, we conducted an additional analysis on these responses to generate a more sophisticated understanding if teachers' rationales for identifying topics in classroom curricula as potentially problematic or

“sensitive.” A brief summary these preliminary findings is presented at the conclusion of the section below entitled *Teacher Preferences by Activity Type*.

Insufficient Knowledge

Six teachers cited students’ **insufficient knowledge** ($n = 23$ comments, 23%) as a rationale for negatively evaluating a curricular activity. This finding is intriguing because it echoes findings from a large body of research that demonstrates how important students’ background knowledge—the previous information and understanding that they bring to a learning experience based on personal experience and prior studies—is in their understanding and analysis of academic content (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012; McNamara, Kintsch, Songer, & Kintsch, 1996). Our team applied the code INSUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE to any teacher assertion that her students lacked the background knowledge, vocabulary, or content familiarity to adequately understand, participate in, or enjoy an activity. An example of the application of this code can be found in our interview with Mrs. Moore, who explained that one *Personal Writing* assignment was particularly challenging for students who were unfamiliar with the terminology it presented:

Oh, this was very hard. The personal writing about the five qualities a receiver must have ... It was very hard to tell the difference between “intelligence” and “wisdom”. They got very flubbed up with that, and then how to show the difference between those two things.

Required Preparation

Four teachers associated unanticipated **required preparation** ($n = 21$ comments, 21%) as a rationale for a negative evaluation of some curricular activities. Teachers’ concerns regarding the amount of work or effort that a curriculum costs them is associated with their concern with a lack of adequate time in a school week allotted to effective instructional planning (Hargreaves, 1992); therefore, we learned that some of *The Giver Educator’s Resource*

lessons were perceived by teachers as demanding more time than they had originally estimated or predicted. Our team applied the code REQUIRED PREPARATION to any teacher comment that the activity caused (or would cause) her to spend too much time preparing the students to engage in the activity, or simply that the activity required additional planning efforts that she had not anticipated. An example of the application of this code can be found in our interview with Ms. Wells, who mentioned that before her students were able to participate in an *Interactive* debate activity she had to dedicate instructional time to explicitly teaching the rules and procedures of a debate:

I had to do a lot of prep work of what a debate look like. What kind of rules are there during a debate? It's not a screaming match. It's actually very logical and very one step at a time. So we went through all the steps. I printed the steps for them...So then I had to take a whole class period for them to create, with their team, their points.

Teacher Preferences by Activity Type

Perspective Taking Activities

It is unsurprising to us that the teachers spent little time discussing the *Perspective Taking (PT)* activities (Activities 2 & 7) during the interviews. These two “lessons” constituted a small portion of the greater curriculum and were deliberately included as embedded assessments designed to evaluate adolescents’ social perspective taking skills (Diazgranados, Selman, & Dionne, 2015). When developing *The Giver Educator’s Resource*, we made an attempt to align these measures with *The Giver* story (e.g., added certain *Giver* characters’ names to the PT dilemma scenarios), yet the assessments were not intended to be a permanent facet of our crossmedia curriculum. The teachers’ predominately negative evaluations of these activities tended to highlight their students’ frustration with 1) how similarly worded the two PT scenarios were, which gave students an impression that they

were repeating work, and 2) how distantly connected the characters in the PT scenarios were to the characters in *The Giver*. Given that these specific activities were not designed to be socioacademic learning experiences for youth and thus that will not be incorporated in future versions of the curriculum, we have elected not to over-analyze these PT embedded assessments in this paper.

Personal Writing Activities

Even though the *Personal Writing* activities comprised over one third of the total lessons in *The Giver Educator's Resource* (6 out of 15), the teachers spent only one fifth of our interview time discussing these lessons. The purpose of the *Personal Writing* activities was to provide students with opportunities to reflect on the book and film, draw connections between their own lives and those of the characters, and to practice their composition skills. If they preferred, teachers had the option to evaluate students' writing output as informal content comprehension and literacy assessments (Calfee & Miller, 2005; Miller & Calfee, 2004). In order to be sensitive to teachers' fluctuating resources and instructional time, the curriculum explicitly stated that it was up to the teacher's discretion to decide how extensive she would require students' writing outputs to be. For example, the variation in teachers' implementation of these writing assignments is well illustrated by Activity #3 of the curriculum (See Appendix C for full samples of students' writing from each classroom). Across our study classrooms, the teachers' decision-making about 1) the length of students' writing outputs ranged from two sentences to two fully composed paragraphs, 2) the caliber of the assignment ranged from a quick homework exercise to a polished, in-class writing project, 3) the medium in which students produced their writing varied from pen-and-paper to typed on a computer, and 4) the evaluation of the writing ranged from no feedback from

the teacher whatsoever to a guiding rubric detailing the teacher's expectations to formal comments and a grade awarded by the teacher.

ACTIVITY #3—The youth in Jonas's Community are *required* to do a certain amount of *volunteer* work. This is ironic. **Should volunteer work be required of youth in your community? Why? Justify your argument with logic or evidence.**

Figure 1. Activity #3, as originally presented by *The Giver Educator's Resource* curriculum.

Teachers' criticisms of the writing assignments mostly centered on their concerns for their students' **insufficient knowledge** (lack of background knowledge and vocabulary necessary to adequately comprehend and complete the assignment), which therefore **required preparation** to ensure that students had all the information they needed. This sentiment is well summarized by Mrs. Franco who suggested as a curricular modification that a word bank accompany each activity:

They literally don't know the vocabulary word because how much has it really come up? I would add the pre-assessment so that it had a little box that had my study, you know, my own definition of "ethical" in it. Because even if you think about their standardized testing, they do that a lot in it. I feel like you guys missed a lot of good pre-assessment information because 98% of our kids had no idea what "ethical" means. And had you simply had a box at the top that said, "Ethical means, 'blabbity blah blah blah.' Keeping that in mind, what do you think about this?"

While Mrs. Franco was suggesting a future modification to the curriculum, Mrs. Wells had the same idea and actively modified the instructions for Activity #3 before presenting it to her students. As we see below, and in the full example in Appendix C, Mrs. Wells added definitions for *required*, *volunteered*, and *ironic* to the assignment description:

ACTIVITY #3—The youth in Jonas's Community are *required* to do a certain amount of *volunteer* work. This is ironic. **Should volunteer work be required of youth in your community? Why? Justify your argument with logic or evidence.**

Required- someone in authority instructs or expects someone to do something

Volunteer- freely offer to do something

Ironic- happening in the opposite way to what is expected

Use the space below to write your two paragraphs. Please check for spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

Figure 2. Activity #3, modified by Ms. Wells to include a vocabulary bank for students.

In addition to concerns that the writing prompts included vocabulary that was unfamiliar to the students, some teachers in the study expressed a desire to assign a grade to students' work. Ms. O'Hara, added the "Point, Evidence, Evaluation (PEE)" rubric to each of the curriculum's writing assignments:

Point, Evidence, Explanation.

I think kids should For example.... This shows that...

Another reason is... In other words....

My final reason is... This is important because....

Figure 3. The PEE rubric that Ms. O'Hara added to each *Personal Writing* activity.

As shown in her example for Activity #3, Ms. O'Hara consistently reminded her students to "Remember to PEE on your paper." However, despite this clever mnemonic acronym, Mrs. O'Hara expressed feeling overwhelmed by a sense of obligation to offer students feedback on their writing:

As a teacher, I have 54 students I'm keeping track of. So honestly, I wasn't looking close at their writing, I was just having them complete the activities but wasn't able to give them feedback in a timely way where it was improving their writing since there was so much of it going on.

Again, grading student work was not an expectation mandated by the curriculum, yet teachers commonly described the idea of feedback as a cumbersome obligation. Mrs. Moore captured the perspective of her peers when she good-naturedly exclaimed: *It is only me here, and I do not want to grade all of these papers!* [Laughter.]

Alternately, the teachers' praises for the *Personal Writing* activities were consistent with their rationales for positively evaluating the overall curriculum; particularly, they appreciated how the topics **connected to real-life** student experiences. For example, Mrs. Wells described how her students felt personally invested in the topic of Activity #3 because it reminded them of their own experiences participating in a form of required charity:

A lot of them talked about communion, their First Communion and how they had to do a certain class for the communion, even though it wasn't their idea at all to do this. It was completely their parents'. That's what they brought up. They liked that one, Number 3.

Mrs. Franco also noted that the topic excited a sense of justice and questions of fairness in her classroom:

You're telling them, you're not giving them a choice. You know. And I think it's because kids this age have so few things they get a choice in, and now you're talking about that it would be required. And I loved that so many of them caught on to, well, "it's not really volunteer work if you're required."

In Mrs. Moore's classroom, the students were so impassioned by the topic they requested an opportunity to formally debate about it with their peers:

But there was one activity they wanted that one as a debate. Let's see... [looks through curriculum pages] ... It was the volunteer work. They wanted the volunteer work to be a debate. They liked that to be a debate because there is community service, then there's volunteer work... there are the different ways that we put it out. It is ironic, the way we actually in our school make kids do community service. But we don't call it volunteering. [Laughter.] They had to clean the deck of the battleship last year.

Here we learn that Mrs. Moore's students, who live near the ocean, made a connection between the ironic dilemma presented in *The Giver*, where the characters are required to do volunteer work, and their own real-life irony of being required to clean boats at the seaport as a form of community service. What is interesting about Mrs. Moore's comment also is that she is highlighting the teachers' and students' appreciation for the *Interactive* activities in the curriculum. We interpreted the students' requests to transform a writing assignment into a debate activity as further evidence that the lessons in which students are able to collaborate and interact were the most favored in the curriculum.

Interactive Activities

Our research team used the term "*Interactive*" to describe any exercise in which students were invited to collaborate to complete an activity (i.e. the *Discussion & Debate* activities and the *Scriptwriting & Role Playing* activities). As shown in Table 3, the teachers spent more time during our interviews discussing the *Interactive* activities presented in *The Giver Educator's Resource* than any other type of lesson. While they had both positive and negative evaluations, a majority of the teachers' comments (64%) presented rationales for why they approved of the *Interactive* lessons. By far, these lessons were the most popular among our classes, a finding that is unsurprising given an increasing body of research that examines the academic and social utility of dialogic instruction in classrooms (Elizabeth, Ross-Anderson, Snow, & Selman, 2012; Elizabeth, 2014; Soter, Wilkinson, Murphy, Rudge, Reninger, & Edwards, 2008). Inspired by students' enthusiasm for engaging in passionate classroom discussions, coupled with increasing evidence that these experiences bolster students' content comprehension and argumentation skills (Duhaylongsod et al., 2015; Kucan & Beck, 2003) as well as social skills (Elizabeth, under review; McEwin, Dickinson, & Anfara, 2005), recent innovative curriculum efforts have positioned dialogic instruction as

central to their pedagogical approach (e.g. Word Generation, n.d; Facing History and Ourselves, n.d.; Center for Philosophy for Children, 2014; The Great Books Foundation, 2016; etc).

Typically, dialogic instruction has been viewed as “discussion based,” meaning the activities tend to be implemented as some form of structured opportunity for students to engage in conversation or controlled dialogue with each other (as opposed to sitting quietly in their seats receiving a lecture from their teacher)¹¹. A primary goal of dialogic instruction is to allow students to retain interpretive authority (Aukerman, 2007; Mayer, 2009) or the freedom to formulate and express their own thoughts about an academic topic, and to challenge or accept the perspectives of their peers, without interruption from the teacher. With *The Giver Educators Resource*, we piloted our extended conceptualization of dialogic instruction by introducing the *Scriptwriting & Role Playing* activities. Our hypothesis was that these activities would excite students’ sense of creativity and intellect by allowing them to 1) consider multiple forms of media (the book and film), 2) write an extended scene to demonstrate how they envision the plot would unfold, 3) collaborate with their peers to refine and ultimately 4) “produce” those scenes as entertainment for their classmates. These activities are designed to encourage students to practice academic competencies (e.g., reading comprehension, plot analysis, written and oral communication, etc.) and social competencies (e.g., listening, perspective taking, compromise, etc.). Judging from the teachers’ comments in our study, the *Interactive* activities succeeded in their academic and social goals.

All seven of the teachers positively evaluated the *Interactive* activities. After analyzing the total positive interview utterances, we determined that **student enjoyment** ($n = 48$,

¹¹ Common activity types include: structured debates, fishbowl discussions, and Socratic seminars, among many others.

64%) was cited most often as a rationale for appreciating the lessons, followed by a **social benefit** ($n = 20$, 27%) and an **academic benefit** ($n = 18$, 24%). Phrases such as “so much fun,” “students loved,” and “really great time” were used repeatedly by the teachers to express how much the students enjoyed the *Interactive* activities. For example, Activity #6 introduced a particularly popular debate prompt that asked students to consider the ethical complications of lie-detector tests.

ACTIVITY #6—Imagine a society that requires everyone to wear a lie detector device at all times. If the detector found out that someone had lied, the information would go to the authorities (teachers, police, or judges). Is this a good idea?

Figure 4. Activity #6, as originally presented by *The Giver Educator's Resource* curriculum.

When reflecting on Activity #6, Ms. O'Hara enthusiastically shared:

They loved it! Yeah, there was a certain dynamic in the class. The kids really loved to be on the side they didn't believe, cause they thought they were proving themselves even more. It was really great cause they changed one another's thinking, you know? Initially everybody thought they all agreed with this one sentiment and then, kinda towards the end, they started to see, "Well, actually..."

Not only does Ms. O'Hara's praise reflect students' enjoyment for the debate, it also notes how pleased she was that students were compelled to formulate convincing arguments (an academic skill) and be open to changing their perspectives (a social skill). Mrs. Levine noted that she and her partner teacher, Mrs. Franco, were so pleased with the outcome of the student debates that they decided to modify a *Personal Writing* activity within the curriculum (Activity #8—*Is it okay for children to "play" war?*) to include a debate: *We expanded one of the other ones to include a debate, because our students just ran with it, full throttle. And that really tied in well with our "decision making" and "supporting your ideas" and all of that.* Mrs. Levine's rationale demonstrates that not only were her students engaged by the activity, but that its properties aligned with their school's greater academic objectives.

Activities #13 and #14, a sequential *Scriptwriting & Role Playing* exercise, also generated positive reviews from the teachers. During a turning point in *The Giver* story, the lead character discovers that his father sometimes “releases” (a euphemism for “kill” or “euthanize”) infants as part of his employment.

Activity #13—Imagine that Jonas went home after witnessing his father “release” the baby. Use your imagination to write a scene from the story that shows how Jonas approaches his father after the release. What would Jonas say? How would father react? How would this conversation affect other members of their family?

Activity #14—In small groups, allow students to share their scenes and synthesize ideas to develop a collaborative scene from the story that depicts Jonas’ reaction to Father. After each group has acted out their scene, engage students in a whole class discussion about the different reactions Jonas may have had.

Figure 5. Activities #13 & #14, as originally presented by *The Giver Educator’s Resource* curriculum.

Interestingly, teachers tended to describe the seemingly morbid plot twist that was central to this assignment as highly engaging and exciting for the students. As described by Ms. O’Hara, this *Interactive* lesson allowed students to practice their plot analysis, perspective taking, and creative writing skills:

The students were already invested in the text, they were already invested in the characters, and it’s this huge bomb that’s dropped. They were already very invested in that moment, so I think that helps. And I liked the fact that it asks you to take perspective about, well, how would the father react if Jonas came in. So they had to write thinking about that. I also liked the creativity in the writing, so I gave students permission to either write it out as a script or write it as a narrative. I thought that allowed different students to write in a creative way that they felt successful in.

She extended this line of thinking to share how, after the students composed their scenes, they surprised her by “taking emotional risks” when acting the scenes out in front of their peers:

Sometimes sixth graders can be sarcastic. They don't take things seriously. But they were really invested in their work. They took some big emotional risks in front of one another, which I thought was really nice. Cause that's a really uncomfortable thing to do, to act and perform and try to really seem upset. I was really surprised with how much the students went there.

While the social benefits of the *Interactive* exercises were articulated nicely by Ms. O'Hara, all seven of the teachers in our study mentioned them, and commented on how the exercises helped to bolster a sense of friendship among the students and foster a more positive climate within the classroom.

The findings from our study demonstrate that teachers were overwhelmingly in favor of the *Interactive* components of the curriculum. However, six out of our seven educators' reviews were accompanied by some reservations. Of the negative evaluations associated with these lessons, most were rooted in teachers' concerns that the topics addressed **sensitive subjects** ($n = 22$, 19%). Since the book's publication in 1993, *The Giver* has been described as controversial due to its themes of civic unrest, adolescent sexual urges, infanticide, and euthanasia¹², and therefore our research team was unsurprised by teachers' hesitations about its storylines. For example, consider again Activities #13 and #14 where Jonas sees his father “release” a baby. In reference to this plot twist, Mrs. Greene shared with us concerns that her students were disturbed by the story's content, particularly after watching the movie scene:

¹² As explained by the American Library Association, “*The Giver* was one of the most frequently challenged books from 1990–2000, as recorded by the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom. A challenge is a formal, written attempt to remove a book from a library or classroom” (Margaret A. Edwards Award web page, 2016).

I think what was really hard for the kids, too, was the baby, of course. It always is it's a hard for to see something like that and, you know, we talked a lot around Lois Lowry and her craft of writing. All around those instances is why. We talked about why would she put that in there? And just the graphicness of it, yeah, it was hard for the kids too, they did not like it. My kids didn't even like it in the movie cause now they're actually seeing it and a lot of kids closed their eyes and, "I'm not going to watch this," and turned away...

Mrs. Greene was clearly upset by her students' reactions and thus attempted to avert the students' analysis into a consideration of author's purpose. Later in her interview, Mrs. Greene continued to describe her discomfort for the themes of "release" that are presented in *The Giver*:

I think around Rosemary's release, is that nobody really understood at that point what was going on with her... A lot of kids, they never really said anything about it. I just let them come to their own conclusions about it and a lot of kids said yes, she's going to elsewhere and the belief of elsewhere, and even when you questioned them about, well, where is elsewhere and some would say we expect Peter Pan, it's like Neverland. And I said yeah, ok, or heaven, or this beautiful place.

Here, Mrs. Greene is referring to the content of *Interactive Activities* #10 and #11 where students are asked to consider the ethical complications of a character that has requested her own "release."

Activities #10 & #11—Rosemary, the former Receiver-in-training, experienced memories of poverty, hunger, and terror. She was so overwhelmed by these memories that she asked the Chief Elder if she could be released.

DEBATE PROMPT: When Rosemary requested her own release, was this suicide? Encourage students to also consider these questions: What type of relief, if any, did Rosemary expect from her release? What other options did Rosemary have within the Community for coping with her immense new sadness?

Figure 6. Activities #10 & #11, as originally presented by *The Giver Educator's Resource*

curriculum.

Mrs. Greene was 1 of 2 teachers in our study who opted out of teaching Activities #10 & #11. As illustrated in her comments, rather than engage her students in a conversation about the possible meaning of and implications for Rosemary's actions, Mrs. Greene felt more comfortable allowing her students to draw their own conclusions (which were sometimes inaccurate) about the fate of the character. Interestingly, of the 22 total negative teacher evaluations of the *Interactive* lessons, 21 (95%) were in reference to the content addressed in Activities #10 & #11. We identified multiple reasons for why teachers interpreted sensitive topics in *The Giver* as potentially problematic for students. These teacher rationales are summarized in the paragraphs below, yet due to the complexity and depth of these findings, a full analysis is best reserved as the subject of an independent review and study in its own right. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus on the evidence that—despite the notable ambivalence associated with the potentially controversial topic associated with Activities #10 & #11—teachers and students overwhelmingly praised the curriculum's *Interactive* components as enjoyable and effective in developing social and academic competencies in sixth graders.

Sensitive Subjects

As noted previously, six teachers cited a **sensitive subject** ($n = 24, 24\%$) as a rationale for assigning a negative evaluation to a curricular activity. In specific reference to *The Giver* story and curriculum, the content teachers identified as most worrisome included “release” (infanticide, euthanasia, and self-harm) and “the stirrings” (adolescent romantic feelings and puberty). During our interviews, when teachers disclosed concerns for particularly uncomfortable content matter, we asked follow-up questions intended to encourage the teachers to elaborate on their thoughts about sensitive topics beyond *The Giver*

and in other aspects of their teaching experiences. These follow-up questions helped us to generate a baseline understanding of *why* teachers become uncomfortable when faced with sensitive topics across different curricula and course subjects. Listed in no particular order, below are four commonly cited rationales that teachers provided to explain their hesitations when encountering sensitive content in curricula.

Desire to Preserve Childhood Innocence

Teachers expressed a desire to preserve their students' childhood innocence or to shelter youth from topics that may cause them to grow up too quickly. When discussing her students' ages, and the fact that they had only recently transitioned into middle school, Mrs. Franco said, "*They just got out of an elementary school. You know they're not even like four months into not being in an elementary school anymore.*" This concern for sixth graders' capacity to contemplate mature topics was shared by Ms. O'Hara, who said:

I look at some of my students and they believe in Santa Claus. They're so young. I know this book is about coming of age and realizing the reality of the world...I didn't necessarily want to have them grow up sooner than they need to just yet.

The sentiments described here highlight how sensitive early adolescence, and the transition from elementary to middle school, can be for both students and their teachers. Teachers of this particularly delicate developmental stage in youth's lives are faced with a need to both protect their students' childlike innocence, while also nurturing the social and academic competencies they will require in adulthood.

Anxiety that Students Will Mimic Unhealthy Behaviors Introduced in the Curriculum

The teachers also articulated worry that their impressionable students may engage in unhealthy copycat behaviors that the youth otherwise may not have considered or been aware existed as a possibility. Specifically, Ms. Wells explained that the suicide and euthanasia

themes introduced in *The Giver* were unsettlingly similar to self-harm behaviors that were trending among girls in her middle school:

Well, what happens is, things ebb and flow, I feel, like in middle school. Right now, we have a population of very popular girls who are all cutting. And we don't know why, but we know it ebbs and flows. A group will do it, and then it disappears for two or three years. And then a group will do it, and then it disappears. Right now we have a lot, and so suicide is a very hot topic. No one's committed suicide at our school, but we have a lot of girls talking about it. And so we just didn't want to go there without talking to parents.

Mrs. Levine reinforced the legitimacy of Ms. Wells' worry by disclosing a personal story of her own that depicted adolescent self-harm:

When I was in sixth grade I started cutting and it was because I had heard about it. I never in my life would probably have just picked up a razor and started cutting of my own accord. It was, I heard someone talking about it and I was like, 'Oh, I'm going to give that a try.' So that's my only hesitancy now, is that I am nervous that I would have someone who had never heard of it, never thought about it, suddenly be like, 'Hmm, let me give that a try.'

Again, these anecdotes underscore the delicate developmental stage of adolescence that middle school teachers are tasked with helping their students navigate.

Fear that Parents will be Angry or Disapprove of the Subject Matter

Teachers also mentioned concerns for how parents would react to potentially controversial curriculum content in their classrooms. When reflecting on who would respond negatively to sensitive subject matter, Mrs. O'Hara said, "*Not the kids. It'd be parents, yeah. In my district, at my school in particular, they have quite a bit of cull and say.*" Mrs. Moore echoed this by explaining that, in her 24 years of teaching experience, it tended to be the parents who were not ready for the sensitive content, not the students:

There are a lot of books that I would like to recommend to my kids because they're there [mentally / emotionally ready], but there is sex, drugs, and rock n' roll in the books...and then the parents will be reluctant.

However, Mrs. Moore described a willingness to take chances in her classroom and reported having developed confidence to introduce complicated conversations, despite the potential for parent pushback: “*Here’s the thing: Teachers always worry about that parent. I do. Because I always push the content...In The Giver, it was the wet dreams, the stirrings...You have to push it [taboo topics] with these kids. They want it.*” Her rationale suggests that the delicate sensitivities teachers associate with early adolescents may be more accurately described as fueled by a fear of backlash from protective adults, rather than from impressionable youth.

Professional Pressure to Err on the Side of Conservatism

Another interesting finding, and one that is worthy of exploring in more depth in future analysis, was the tendency for the less experienced teachers to default to pressure from their tenured co-teachers by erring on the side of conservatism when addressing sensitive subjects in the classroom. Ms. Levine, who was new as a teacher in her school, described experiencing pressure to censor the reading material made available in her classroom library:

When I got [to Rocky Creek], I have those top cabinets full of other books that were taken out because when I asked teachers, ‘Okay, I’m putting these books out for my sixth graders,’ they were like, ‘No, don’t put that one out for your sixth graders.’ Whereas I was like, I want to make all my books available. You know, they were talking about how [the students] are just not ready for that, and they’re not going to understand it, so on and so forth.

Mrs. O'Hara, who was also new to her teaching position at Hamilton Middle School joked that she would default to tenured teachers' advice until she developed a stronger reputation at the school:

As a second year teacher, I just felt that I can't stir the pot more than I really need to... You know I'm not tenured, and I'm new. Again, because I don't have a reputation at the school yet, I haven't proven myself. So I try to walk the line.

These comments indicate that new teachers—despite their personal judgments and natural inclinations as educators—require time to develop their own sense of instructional autonomy, and job security, before they are willing to tackle sensitive subjects in their classrooms.

Moving Forward with Sensitive Subjects in Curricula

There seems to be a continuum, or varying degree of risk and hesitation, that teachers assign to the sensitivity of any given curricular topic. It is a complicated undertaking to attempt to understand why one topic is more concerning than another. As candidly put by Ms. Wells, when asked why she felt more comfortable discussing infanticide than suicide with her students, she responded, *"You just asked why is it harder to talk about suicide than it is about killing babies. I have no idea."* Regardless of the sensitivity of these topics, Mrs. Moore suggested that avoiding challenging subjects in classrooms is potentially harmful to students, or at least naive on the parts of the adults in their lives:

The kids all know. [In 6th grade] we read a book that deals with prejudice and it is told through multiple views. The KKK comes into a Vermont town in the 1920's. The preacher is a child molester, but it's not overtly obvious. You have to dig into the meaning... the students want more of that type of content. The kids all know that this stuff is around. It's in the language they hear, the shows they watch, and in the video games, and on the Internet... Honestly, it's all over. To make

those themes “taboo” almost makes students want to know more about it... Even at home, not just at school. These topics are not addressed anywhere. You know what I mean? I think adults just don’t talk about it.

Mrs. Moore’s suggestion that youth are already exposed to these topics in their daily lives is supported by research in adolescent psychology (Martin, Houston, Mmari, & Decker, 2012). Furthermore, experts have found that allowing youth to *talk* with each other and with trusted adults about these topics increases their understandings and ability to navigate challenging experiences and thoughts that they may encounter in their personal lives (Ciffone, 1993; Muehlenkamp, Walsh, & McDade, 2010). In other words, *addressing* sensitive subjects in classrooms, however uncomfortable for the teacher, causes less harm than avoiding the subjects all together.

Understandably, classroom teachers face many pressures that cause them to hesitate when engaging students in difficult conversations, yet there are strategies for overcoming this dilemma. One solution, as suggested by Ms. Wells, is to seek the support of school administrators and guidance counselors. In response to Ms. Wells’ hesitation to engage her students in the discussion about a character’s suicide, the guidance counselor emailed her:

As far as what to look for, or key words, kids who see suicide as a solution would have been a problem. The word “hopelessness” would have been a problem. Listen for the why they do it. Definitely end with a message of hope and talking to an adult if you need help. It’s so important to talk about and having a character to focus on is great. You will do a great job.

Furthermore, fictional media narratives can offer youth a safe platform to contemplate hypothetical challenging situations that they may or may not encounter in real life. By distancing themselves from direct personal connections or relationships, young people can explore, question, and reflect upon difficult events without feeling emotional pressure.

Limitations

The sample of teachers in this study is limited because it includes only white, native-English speaking women. However, within this pool exists a collective of unique individuals who range significantly in age, geographic location, professional experience, personal beliefs, and teaching style. We suggest that future iterations of this study sample a larger population of diverse educators.

Additionally, one pedagogical approach within this curriculum was to draw upon a crossmedia phenomenon that links the narratives of a book and its film. Our hypothesis was that offering educators textual excerpts of the movie script would sufficiently replace students' experience viewing that scene on a screen. However, our research team neglected to gather sufficient data to fully understand how using these media in tandem in the classroom affected teaching and learning. We have some interview data where teachers reference the technical use of these media (as opposed to the *content value* of the media) in classrooms. For example, Mrs. Franco described how she and Ms. Levine deliberately played clips of *The Giver* movie for their students, following relevant chapters or paragraphs in *The Giver* book:

Now we went out and bought the movie so that we could show the clips, which was fine... And we both said, had we not shown the clip, this kind of just really, like without the clip, would have had no meaning.

Mrs. Franco rationalized that the act of actually playing parts of the movie during deliberate moments throughout her implementation of the curriculum—as opposed to simply reading excerpts of the script, which are embedded as text into the *Educator's Resource*, or to playing the film in its entirety once students had finished reading the book—was an effective

strategy for activating and retaining her students' engagement in the text and enthusiasm for participating in curricular activities. While our participating teachers, like Mrs. Franco, did occasionally discuss the use of crossmedia formats in their classrooms, our understandings of the teachers' perceptions with this method are shallow. In future extensions of this research, it would be useful to carefully gather data (perhaps in the form of student and teacher interviews or surveys) that ascertain detailed perspectives on how the act of using a book and a film in tandem affects teaching and learning.

Implications

Allow Youth Film Culture to be Commonplace in Curricula

Film literacy scholars have noted the relationship between books and film (Berger & Woodfall, 2012) and thus book-to-film crossmedia have existed in our culture since the invention of motion pictures in the 1890s. However, as we enter an era where film technology and digital communication grow increasingly sophisticated, so do the relationships between books and movies. Further, while tween (ages 8–12) and teen (13–17) consumption of new media is increasing, research shows that these young populations still spend the majority of their time watching television and movies (Common Sense Media, 2014). The original trend in our culture's history was for a beloved book to eventually (sometimes years or decades after publication, but more often never) be transformed into a film. However, today's relationship between these media is more intimate, making it standard practice for a book publishing deal to also preemptively include film production rights for the story. This suggests that film, as well as other visual media arts, are becoming an undeniable fixture in students' lives. Given this understanding, it would benefit curriculum designers to welcome these crossmedia experiences into teaching and learning. This suggestion is supported by the teachers in this study who confirmed that students value

opportunities to make connections between their real lives and the content they discuss in school, and that these youths' realities are inundated with visual media. Additionally, filmmakers are adept at understanding youth culture and tend to select book-to-film translations that effectively embrace the social trends of modern youth. Beyond film, today's youth have access to myriad forms of media—television, websites, webisodes, digital photographs, etc.—all of these digitally connected media can be viewed as sources of literacy by educators. As such, we suggest that educators piggyback on this insight by introducing more crossmedia experiences into the classroom.

Draw on Crossmedia to Delicately Introduce Sensitive Subjects in Classrooms

Sensitive subjects are an important and inevitable element of many curricula, particularly in today's media-saturated world. Educators can borrow from fictional characters' dilemmas and challenges as a platform to help youth reflect upon an endless number of difficult or complicated topics that are experienced in everyday life. As found in this study, common concerns reported by teachers as a barrier to these delicate conversations are 1) a desire to preserve the innocence of childhood, 2) worry that parents will be angered by the content, 3) pressure from more experienced teachers to avoid controversial subject matter and 4) anxiety that students will mimic or experiment with dangerous behaviors introduced in the curricular or media content. However, as suggested in this study and supported in previous scholarship (Elizabeth, 2014) these worries/threats/challenges can be mitigated when teachers have candid conversations with their school administrators and guidance counselors about any concerns they have. Further, research in the field of adolescent development has also found that having "difficult" conversations is an effective and healthy method for preventing dangerous behaviors and attitudes in youth (Hicks, McRee, & Eisenberg, 2013; Miller, 2012). Rather than avoiding

sensitive curricular content, we suggest that teachers—with support from their administrators and teaching peers—capitalize on the benefits that media can offer in facilitating these conversations. By addressing a dilemma or challenge as experienced by a fictional or distant character, students and teachers may have the freedom to candidly discuss the content in ways that are beneficial to 1) youth's understanding of social and ethical dilemmas, and 2) youth's personal reflection and development of solutions to these challenges.

Further, as indicated in our data analysis, teachers who feel uncomfortable with curricular content may feel compelled to either significantly modify an original lesson in order to soften the delivery or discussion of a sensitive subject, or they may elect to fully eliminate that lesson from their teaching plans. Either way, the likelihood of this avoidant decision-making must be acknowledged by curriculum designers as an important aspect of lesson development. To address this phenomenon, we offer 3 recommendations to curriculum designers: First, create flexible curricula, like that we have modeled in *The Giver Educator's Resource*, where educators are able to teach lessons in isolation or curate any combination of lessons that she feels are most appropriate for her set of learners. Second, curriculum designers must ask themselves, as teachers consistently do, if the content included in the lessons are genuinely necessary to achieve the learning goals of the curriculum. That a topic is personally interesting to adults or provocative to youth is not an appropriate rationale for inclusion in the curriculum; all content must purposefully contribute to an academic or social learning goal. Third, when it is educationally relevant, designers must not shy away from sensitive subject matter in curricula and instead must be sure to offer suggestions for how educators can solicit support from parents or school personnel. As discussed in this study, candid conversations with other adults can reveal that

many hesitations are unnecessary and actually serve to undermine adolescents' capacity to think critically about sensitive topics.

Bring Interactive Media Arts Opportunities into Everyday Classrooms

The most salient findings in this study suggest that scholars' notions of dialogic instruction would benefit by being extended beyond discourse-based exchanges to include other interactive activities similar to the *Scriptwriting* and *Role Playing* exercises piloted in *The Giver Educator's Resource*. We recommend that curricula not only capitalize on students' enthusiasm for visual media by simply connecting books and film in curricula, but that also encourage creativity by allowing students to practice social and academic skills through the interactive work of a scriptwriter, film or theater producer, an actor, etc. As demonstrated in this study, the *Interactive* lessons 1) excited students' enthusiasm for learning and classroom participation, 2) offered creative outlets for basic literacy skills like reading and writing, and 3) encouraged youth to practice valuable speaking and listening skills—all capacities that can ultimately affect positive classroom climate and develop peer friendships, while at the same time enhancing overall academic achievement (Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1997; Jones, Brown, & Aber, 2011). During the *Interactive* lessons, sixth graders collaborated in writing, in discussing, in presenting, in reflecting, and in articulating peer-feedback—all valuable academic skills that extend beyond a traditional dialogic activity.

Furthermore, in addition to scriptwriting and roleplaying, we propose to again borrow from the trends of current media by encouraging future curricula to incorporate elements of *fanfiction* into educative experiences. Fanfiction is generally regarded as public works of fiction created by fans to extend the narratives and plotlines of beloved television, movie, literature, graphic novel, or other entertainment media characters. Not only is it common for fanfiction authors to publish their works online, typically as a member of a

particular forum or website, fanfiction culture embraces a community where readers act not just as an audience, but as critics, editors, and mentors. In this fascinating subculture, fanfiction invites a form of youth peer-review (Kell, 2009, p. 33) in which young people offer each other thoughtful praise and constructive criticisms on plot extensions, character development, appropriate use of vocabulary, etc. (Black, 2005; Kell, 2009). Activities #13 and #14 in *The Giver Educator's Resource* introduce scaffolded fandom writing assignments that demonstrate how an innovative lesson that draws upon properties of fanfiction invites youth to exercise their own intellect and creative writing skills by extending the plot of their favorite media narrative—movies, television, books, videogames, comic books, etc. We hypothesize that this type of innovative curriculum-design, which merges multiple forms of popular media into a single learning environment, has the potential to powerfully engage students in educational processes that benefit their academic, social, *and* media literacy competencies.

PAPER 2 — The Storyteller’s Literary Arts Workshop: A Crossmedia Socioacademic Instructional Approach to Adolescent Literacy

Abstract

This paper introduces an innovative instructional approach called the Storyteller’s Literary Arts Workshop (*Storyteller’s LAW*). The theoretical frame of the Storyteller’s LAW assumes the following: *If students engage in both independent and collaborative creative efforts, in ways that allow them to make connections across a variety of media platforms, as learners, they will 1) be more authentically engaged in the learning process, 2) practice valuable social and academic competencies, and 3) become more critical consumers of entertainment media.* First, I present teacher interviews, student writing samples, and transcripts of classroom discussions to demonstrate how this curricular innovation was implemented in seven sixth-grade Language Arts classrooms. Next, I draw upon theories of constructionism, research in dialogic instruction, and practices in fanfiction as a frame for rationalizing why the Storyteller’s LAW was so positively evaluated by teacher and students. The instructional approach presented in this paper has implications for the effective design of future K–12 curricula and instruction; it encourages educators to incorporate entertainment media content into formal schooling environments.

Introduction

In this paper, I draw upon data from a piloted crossmedia curriculum study to explore how a new instructional approach, called the **Storyteller's Literary Arts Workshop (aka, Storyteller's LAW)**, promotes socioacademic learning in middle school Language Arts classrooms. The Storyteller's LAW is a literacy-based scaffolded sequence of reading, writing, and discussion activities that allows students to work both independently and collaboratively on the composition of a book chapter or movie scene that resolves a suspenseful moment from the original text. I highlight this instructional approach from a collection of sixteen different lessons introduced in *The Giver Educator's Resource*, an exploratory crossmedia literacy curriculum developed to bridge the narratives of *The Giver* book and its film adaptation. In a comprehensive study of teachers' evaluations of all the lessons in *The Giver Educator's Resource* (Paper 1), I found that all seven participating teachers identified the Storyteller's LAW as a positive learning experience that promoted their students' academic and social growth. Based on those findings, in this paper I extend the analysis of the Storyteller's LAW to offer a hypothesis about why this instructional approach was valued by sixth-grade teachers and their students.

In Part One, I introduce the Storyteller's LAW and describe how this instructional approach is situated within a larger crossmedia curriculum. In Part Two, I present data from teacher interviews, student writing samples, and recordings of classroom discussions to show how teachers and students adopted this approach in practice. These data provide examples of students' academic and social learning—or evidence of teachers' perceptions of that learning—as generated during each step of the Storyteller's LAW. In Part Three, I lay the groundwork for an argument that three distinctly different existing pedagogical frameworks,

1) dialogic instruction, 2) constructionism, and 3) Fanfiction, display overlapping characteristics that help explain the value of Storyteller's LAW, as a precursor to Part Four, in which I offer a conceptual rationale for why the Storyteller's LAW was so well-received in practice. Finally, I will conclude this paper by arguing that the Storyteller's LAW is an instructional approach that can be adopted for any crossmedia narrative (book-to-film, etc.), and is applicable across K–12 content areas as a method for educators to capitalize on entertainment media to bolster students' engagement and socioacademic learning in classrooms.

PART ONE

The Storyteller's LAW & *The Giver* Crossmedia Curriculum Study

The Giver Educator's Resource is a curriculum that was piloted in a small study ($n = 7$ sixth-grade Language Arts classrooms) to help researchers explore the value of delivering socioacademic content to adolescents using crossmedia resources. I use the term *socioacademic* to describe a learning experience that synchronistically attends to youths' academic skills (vocabulary, grammar, content comprehension, critical thinking, etc.) and social skills (empathy, self-awareness, perspective-taking, kindness, etc.). In this case, the crossmedia materials used are Lois Lowry's *The Giver* book (1993) and its movie adaptation by The Weinstein Company (2014). *The Giver Educator's Resource* asserts three pedagogical goals of its instructional approaches: 1) to engage students through the use of dynamic storytelling and interactive lessons, 2) to supplement students' literacy education by offering reading and writing activities, and 3) to stimulate students' ethical reflection by asking them to contemplate and discuss a series of social and moral dilemmas that are presented in the story (Selman & Elizabeth, 2014).

After conducting an initial analysis to understand teachers' and students' experiences using *The Giver Educator's Resource*, I found that teachers overwhelmingly preferred the *Interactive* activities (Elizabeth, Paper 1). Of the 260 total teacher-interview excerpts coded in our dataset, most of those codes (43% or 112 excerpts) referenced the *Interactive* activities; and the majority of those references (64%) were positive evaluations. Upon closer examination of teachers' rationales for positively evaluating the activities, I found that teachers reported favoring the *Interactive* lessons specifically because their students actively enjoyed the lessons (42% of rationales), and because the lessons offered social (20%) and academic (18%) benefits. I also found that, of the *Interactive* activities, teachers commonly praised a sequential writing-collaborating-acting approach that I introduce here as the **Storyteller's Literary Arts Workshop (LAW)** (formerly identified by *The Giver Educator's Resource* as *Activities 13 and 14a, b, & c* or the *Culminating 3E Activity for The Giver*, see Figure 1).

Culminating 3E Activity for *The Giver*

This activity is sequenced into four important steps that build on each other to engage students fully in the 3E experience.

STEP
1

WRITING:

Imagine that Jonas went home after witnessing his father “release” the baby. **Use your imagination to write a scene of the story that shows how Jonas approaches his father about the release.** What would Jonas say? How would Father react? How would this conversation affect other members of the family?

Alternatively, if students believe that Jonas would choose not to approach his father, invite them to **write a journal entry that details Jonas’s reasoning for avoiding this confrontation.**

[In order to give students necessary reflection time, we recommend waiting a day between Step 1’s writing activity and Steps 2 – 4. Further, depending on the needs of the class, the writing activity could be assigned as homework.]

STEP
2

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:

Divide students into small groups of 2 – 3. Ask them to take turns sharing their newly written story scene. After each member in the group has had an opportunity to share, encourage students to discuss the similarities and differences they imagined for the scene.

STEP
3

ACTOR’S STUDIO:

First, in their small groups, give students 10 minutes to synthesize their ideas and develop a collaborative scene from the story that depicts Jonas’ reaction to Father. Next, allow groups to volunteer to act out their scene for the class.

STEP
4

MEDIA DISCUSSION:

After each group has acted out their scene, engage students in a whole class discussion about the different reactions Jonas may have had. Encourage students to consider: **After seeing your classmates interpretation of this scene, do you think differently about how Jonas reacts to Father? Why or why not?**

Figure 1. Activities 13 and 14a, b, & c of the Culminating 3E Activity for *The Giver*, as presented by The Giver Educator’s Resource (Selman & Elizabeth, 2014).

The specific Storyteller’s LAW approach includes a sequence of four activities that are collectively designed to provide a socioacademic experience to students: **Story-writing** (formerly *Writing*), **Table Read** (formerly *Small-group Discussion*), **The Big Premiere** (formerly *Actor’s Studio*), and **Critic’s Choice** (formerly *Media Discussion*)¹³. Table 1 presents a definition for each activity, along with the exact language that was used to present each in *The Giver Educator’s Resource*. Here, I draw upon the content of *The Giver Educator’s Resource*, as well as data from *The Giver Project*, to demonstrate how the Storyteller’s LAW has been enacted in practice. However, *The Giver Educator’s Resource* provides just *one* example of how this instructional approach has been applied in practice; others are possible.

¹³ Since the publication of *The Giver Educator’s Resource* and the refinement of our approach—based on findings from *The Giver Project*—I have slightly modified the terminology of the activities in the Storyteller’s LAW to more accurately describe their pedagogical structure.

Table 1—Storyteller’s LAW, adapted from *The Giver Educator’s Resource*

Activity Title	General Description of Activities	<i>Giver Educators Resource</i> Example
<p>1 Story-writing (Writing)</p>	<p>After being exposed to a suspenseful (cliffhanger or turning-point) moment in the story (book, film, video game, play, etc.), students individually write an extension or resolution of the scene. This extension can take any form of creative writing (book chapter, film scene, television script, blog entry, etc.) approved by the teacher.</p>	<p><i>Imagine that Jonas went home after witnessing his father “release” the baby. Use your imagination to write a scene of the story that shows how Jonas approaches his father about the release. What would Jonas say? How would Father react? How would this conversation affect other members of the family?</i></p>
<p>2 Table Read (Small-group Discussion)</p>	<p>Small groups of students gather to share their story-writings. They collaborate to develop a single, cohesive product that will be publically presented to their peers. The sophistication of the public presentation will depend on the time and resources available to the class.</p>	<p><i>Divide students into small groups of 2–3. Ask them to take turns sharing their newly written story scene. After each member in the group has had an opportunity to share, encourage students to discuss the similarities and differences they imagined for the scene.</i></p>
<p>3 The Big Premiere (Actor’s Studio)</p>	<p>Each team of Table Read Authors will publically present their peers. How “publicly” these products will be presented is at the teacher’s discretion. For example, students may post their products to a class bulletin board; submit to an online blog or website; present a live performance in class; post a pre-recorded video of the production to an online site; prepare a formal PowerPoint, etc.</p>	<p><i>First, in their small groups, give students 10 minutes to synthesize their ideas and develop a collaborative scene from the story that depicts Jonas’ reaction to Father. Next, allow groups to volunteer to act out their scene for the class.</i></p>
<p>4 Critic’s Choice (Media Discussion)</p>	<p>Following The Big Premiere, peers from the class (or a larger learning community), will be invited to publically reflect upon the products by offering feedback, ideas for extensions, constructive criticism, etc. Before participating in the Critic’s Choice, all students should read and/or view the concluding scene as presented by the narrative’s original author, as well as at least one additional professionally published form of the text (i.e., read the book <i>and</i> watch the movie).</p>	<p><i>After each group has acted out their scene, engage students in a whole class discussion about the different reactions Jonas may have had. Encourage students to consider: After seeing your classmates’ interpretation of this scene, do you think differently about how Jonas reacts to Father? Why or why not?</i></p>

PART TWO

The Storyteller's LAW in Practice: Implementation in Seven Classrooms

In this section, I present data obtained from the formative evaluation of the curricular material in *The Giver Educator's Resource* (Selman & Elizabeth, 2014, Paper 1) to provide a case study of how the Storyteller's LAW was implemented in seven different sixth-grade classes. This particular sequence of activities, as collectively introduced by the Storyteller's LAW, is relevant because it demonstrates how students are 1) challenged to independently create an extended book chapter or movie scene from a turning-point moment in *The Giver*, 2) asked to collaborate with a group of peers (or team of writers) to finalize a script to be produced for the class, 3) act out their scene for their classmates, and 4) engage in a collaborative whole class discussion centered on analyzing and comparing the fanfiction scenes. The data I present—teacher interviews, student writing samples, and recordings of classroom discussions—serve to illustrate my deconstruction of each step of the Storyteller's LAW and to show how this approach was enacted in practice.

1 Story-writing

The first of the four sequential steps of the Storyteller's LAW invites students to extend the *narrative* from a suspenseful moment in a story they have been studying in class. The language used to describe the Story-writing activity is deliberately vague in hopes of accommodating a wide range of interpretations of the term **narrative** to include content that might be presented in print form (book or script), video form (movie or television screen), or digital form (website or other internet content). The importance of the *Story-writing* is to provide students with freedom to use their imaginations to compose a conclusion to a

cliffhanger event or turning point in a story's plotline. For this activity, the curriculum assumes that the student writers are unaware of how the author resolved the conflict; thus, the students' versions will presumably be quite different than that of the original text¹⁴. Because students in this first stage, as storywriters, are unaware of how the original author or screenwriter concluded the suspenseful scene, they are challenged to draw upon their understanding of narrative elements like plot, tone, style, and character motivations to generate a conclusion that is conceivably appropriate for the story.

When evaluating the Story-writing step in the Storyteller's LAW, the teachers in *The Giver Project* uniformly reported appreciating the activity because it was both authentically fun for students, and because the exercise attended to academic standards that students were required to learn. For example, in reference to the activity's academic value, Mrs. Moore, a sixth grade teacher from Coastal Pines, a private middle school in North Carolina, said that the Story-writing led to a writing exercise where her students demonstrated that they can assert a claim, clarify why this view is important, and then explain their view in a clear manner.

... this led into a good debate and expository paragraph. Because of the "claim, clarify, explain," I was able to get it in. Instead of waiting until the book is over and then finding some prompt. You know what I mean? I have to have a prompt, so this is a good built in prompt. And these are learners who are learning how to do the expository paragraph. —Mrs. Moore

To assert one's *claim*, to *clarify* one's logic, and to *explain* one's reasoning are all college- and career-readiness competencies that are typically taught in middle school English Language Arts classes (see Sixth Grade Literacy Standards from the Common Core State Standards,

¹⁴ We use the term "text" to broadly encompass any document, media output, or artifact that can be viewed and analyzed (e.g., book, movie, painting, bulletin board, or conversation).

2016 and North Carolina Standard Course of Study, 2010). Additionally, beyond its clear academic standards, teachers attributed the creative element of the Story-writing with effectively soliciting students' effort and engagement. As we can see from her own words in the excerpt above, Mrs. Moore also credited the activity for preparing her students to engage in a discussion about the story's plotline. Another sixth grade teacher, from Cedarland Middle School in Colorado, Mrs. Thomas described how one typically reluctant writer surprised her by composing an extended scene: *"They loved the time to write it out...And then, of course, the one girl wrote a full thing. I was like, 'How did you do this?' This whole play came out!"* The flexibility of this writing task gave students an opportunity to write in the format that was most interesting to them, and this creative flexibility may have inspired otherwise shy or hesitant writers. As explained by Mrs. O'Hara from The Hamilton School in Massachusetts, students appreciated having the agency to select their own creative medium to extend:

I also liked the creativity in the writing, so I gave students permission to either write it out as a script or write it as a narrative. I thought that allowed different students to write in a creative way that they felt successful in.

Following are two examples of student work from Mrs. O'Hara's class. The students in this class typed their assignments on a computer and shared those assignments with their teacher using Google Docs. The first example is a full paragraph written to extend the narrative of *The Giver* book:

Jonas walked into his dwelling, shuddering because he now knew the truth. The truth about release. He tried to avoid him, but the urge to talk to him about this was overpowering. As he approached his father, his mind was still lost. He sat his father down and said, "I know." His father looked confused, so Jonas said again, "I know the truth about release." His Father froze, like the kid in the war memory, a blank look in his eyes, a motionless body. He finally said "Its not what you th-" "ITS EXACTLY WHAT I THINK", jonas exclaimed, "How could just kill them, how could you." His father looked very surprised, and then said, "There is no reason to shout." Jonas look at his father shook his head and screamed "THERE IS NO REASON TO SHOUT!?!? YOU KILLED THAT BABY LIKE YOU WERE OPENING A CHRISTMAS PRESENT, IF YOU EVEN KNOW WHAT THAT IS!" Jonas ran to his room and slammed the door, as his mind flooded with emotion, sadness and anger. He couldn't believe his father. Jonas didn't sleep a wink that night.

Figure 2. Example of a Story-writing book scene from Mrs. O'Hara's student.

In the second example, a different student from Mrs. O'Hara's class elected to compose an extended scene from *The Giver* movie:

JONAS: *walking up to father*, father, Will you go on a bike ride with me?

FATHER: yes Jonas, i would be happy to go on a ride with you.

JONAS: *riding bikes*, so father, how was your releasing of the baby.

FATHER: yes Jonas, it was a normal procedure and nothing out of the ordinary.

JONAS: father, i saw your release and what happened.

FATHER: uuummmmm..... ok,jonas, what did you think?

JONAS: *angrily saying*, what did i think. you killed it father! you killed it!

FATHER: Jonas, i released it, please use precision of language...

JONAS: *interrupting*, I DON'T CARE! i dont care about precision of language! Father you killed the baby.

FATHER: i just followed the normal rules. i did not do anything wrong.

JONAS: yes, you did father! you, you don't understand.

jonas then rode ahead of his father and kept yelling, i hate this community.
i hate it!

END SCENE

Figure 3. Example of a Story-writing movie scene from Mrs. O'Hara's student.

Alternatively, Mrs. Wells from Angels Middle School in Colorado capitalized on this opportunity to teach her students to write for a specific genre, which in this case was *scriptwriting*. To do this, she modified the instructions of the Story-writing activity to include specific guidelines and an example:

When you write a scene for a play or movie, you write the character's name on the left, a colon (:) then what the character says. When a character does an action, it is in parenthesis. For example:

JONAS: (Walking into the kitchen, staring hard at his Father) Hey dad.

FATHER: (Looking over his shoulder, he looks Jonas up and down) Hi Jonas, how was your day?

Imagine that Jonas went home after witnessing his father 'release' the baby. Use your imagination, and what you know about Jonas and the other characters, to write a scene of the story that shows how Jonas approaches his father about the release. What would Jonas say? How would father react? How would his conversation affect other members of the family?

You must have at least two characters speak and each must speak at least 5 times. You may do more (challenge yourself!!) but you may not do less. HAVE FUN!

JONAS: (running to his room sobbing) How could you Father! How could you kill an innocent newchild

Father: (looking concerned) What are you talking about Jonas?

Jonas: (looking back with terror) This morning w-when you released the twin. How do you have the nerve to kill that newchild! What if that was you, getting killed and then -

Father: (Angrily) How did you know about this Jonas!

Jonas: (shouted) It's not that, How could -

Father: (shouted) Tell me how you know!

Jonas: (quietly) I asked about release.

Father: What do you mean

Jonas: I wanted to know what the word "release" really means

Figure 4. Example of a Story-writing guidelines, written by Mrs. Wells of Colorado.

The data presented here give our reader an idea of how rich students' Story-writings are in respect to literacy skills and creative authority. The examples demonstrate sixth-graders' abilities to adapt their writing for a particular style, genre, and audience. Beyond the activity's academic merit, teachers in this study also reported that the Story-writing helped students

practice specific social skills, like perspective taking and empathy. Mrs. O'Hara talked of how the academic and social benefit clearly emerged in her students' work:

They have to think about character motivations and there's character analysis in it, so they have to think about, why would a character do this. And this flows into settings. They have to consider setting, which we've been talking about a lot in our class...And I liked the fact that it asks you to take perspective about, well, how would the father react if Jonas came in and [inaudible], so they had to write thinking about that.

These teacher evaluations of the Story-writing show how, even in its initial step, the Storyteller's LAW prepares student to engage in a collaborative experience that triggers both academic and social learning.

2 Table Read

The second step of the Storyteller's LAW sequence asks students to gather into small groups to share the content that they generated for the Story-writing exercise. Identified as a *Table Read*, this activity is designed as an opportunity for learners to share their creative ideas and to collaborate with their peers with the primary goal of coming to a consensus on group project that will later be presented publically. *The Giver Educator's Resource* recommends that the small groups for the Table Read include from 2–5 total members.

When describing the Table Read step in the Storyteller's LAW, the teachers in *The Giver Project* offered three primary reasons for appreciating the activity: 1) it encouraged social skills like peer collaboration and compromise, 2) it required students to practice literacy skills like text analysis and writing composition, and 3) it appealed to students' intrinsic motivation to participate, as students appeared to be enthusiastic and engaged when completing the activity. For example, in reference to the Table Read's academic value, Mrs. O'Hara generally referenced the presence of the Common Core Speaking and Listening (2016) standards and

directly listed how the activity attended to her school-specific learning objectives. Below, we see how Mrs. O'Hara summarizes our perception of *socioacademics* by describing how the Table Read's social and academic properties are intertwined:

Collaboratively, it's working together within a group, it's listening to peers and building off of each other's ideas. There's speaking and listening objectives that they're meeting. Using their voice to show emotion, that was one of our objectives one of our days, I can't think of the exact wording that I used for our objective, but it was along the lines of using your voice to convey the tone or mood of a piece of work. There's chair performances, too. I think that's really important to have opportunities for kids to do that. There's a writing piece, because they're trying to work with one another to write the scene.

—Mrs. O'Hara

The Table Read was designed to be a collaborative educational activity that serves as a precursor to prepare youth to engage in a public presentation or demonstration of a sharable artifact. In this case of *The Giver Educator's Resource*, sixth graders were working together to generate content that would later be used for a theatrical performance. Mrs. Greene, of The Roosevelt School in Massachusetts, described her enthusiasm for this step in the Storyteller's LAW:

I thought that was just a great activity that they come up with on their own, they come together and come up with their own consensus on "ok we're working together, let's pull a play together." ...and it was only a short period of time that they were given. So if you saw, they had to storyboard it out after they had chosen their pieces and they, they wrote the play. —Mrs. Greene

Mrs. Greene's reference to a "storyboard" is an example of how an educator can modify the basic parameters of the Table Read in order to adhere to her own teaching style, time or resources, and instructional preferences. Rather than ask her students to formally type an extended scene from *The Giver* book or film, Mrs. Green implemented a series of mini-steps

into the Table Read. First, she encouraged her students to peer-review each other's original scenes, with a specific eye towards creative development and respect to the original author's canon (not grammar, spelling, sentence structure, etc.):

plans what
he will say

Activity #13

Jonas got his bike from the Annex bike post. He angrily rode his bike home and threw it on the ground outside of his dwelling. He stormed inside and plopped down at the table. He sat there and thought about the horrific clip he had just seen on the screen. The house was empty and he waited for his father to arrive home so he could interrogate him. He plotted out what he was going to say as he reviewed the release in his mind. *He talked to the baby like he talked to Gabe and then he poked him in the head with a syringe. He **killed** him, an innocent little baby. Why would he do such a thing?* Then the door opened. Jonas's father entered. Jonas got up and marched to the door. "Hey Jonas-Bonus! How are you?" said Jonas's father. "Good! How was the release?" Jonas exclaimed. "It went well!" said Jonas's father.

asks to
talk to father
in private

Figure 5. Example of a student's peer-review comments from a Table Read session from Mrs. Greene of Massachusetts.

In the example above, we see minor notes written from one student to another, presumably to clarify or summarize the basics of the story elements. Next, Mrs. Greene, asked her students to consider their peers' reviews and, based on that feedback, her students briefly sketched a revised idea of the scene onto a sharable document. She provided her students with a basic "Scene Card" template for organizing their understanding of the story's setting, plot, and mood:

SCENE CARD

Interior or Exterior: Describe in Detail (you can illustrate if this helps)	Location/Place House	Time of Day: Night
What happens in the Scene (2-3 sentences) Jonas Comes Home and He is acting so calm even though Jonas confront father Yells father asked How He found out. Jonas says Daring + ran in a office. Hall of records mom comes in with Lily what's going on? Lily go up stairs. OK we will talk later OK		
What is the mood of the scene? (Angry? Sad? Confused?) Describe for each character 1-2 sentences Jonas: Jonas would be in the scene He would feel angry and disappointment		
Mother mother would feel in the scene confused		
Father father would feel in the scene calm		
Lily Lily would feel in the scene obedience		

Figure 6. A completed Scene Card used by a student from Mrs. Greene's class in preparation for a Table Read session.

After students have completed their scene cards, they returned to their Table Read groups to share the content of these cards. As a final step in their collaborative process, Mrs. Greene

encouraged her groups of students to collaboratively develop storyboards that illustrate their group's consensus on a scene for the story:

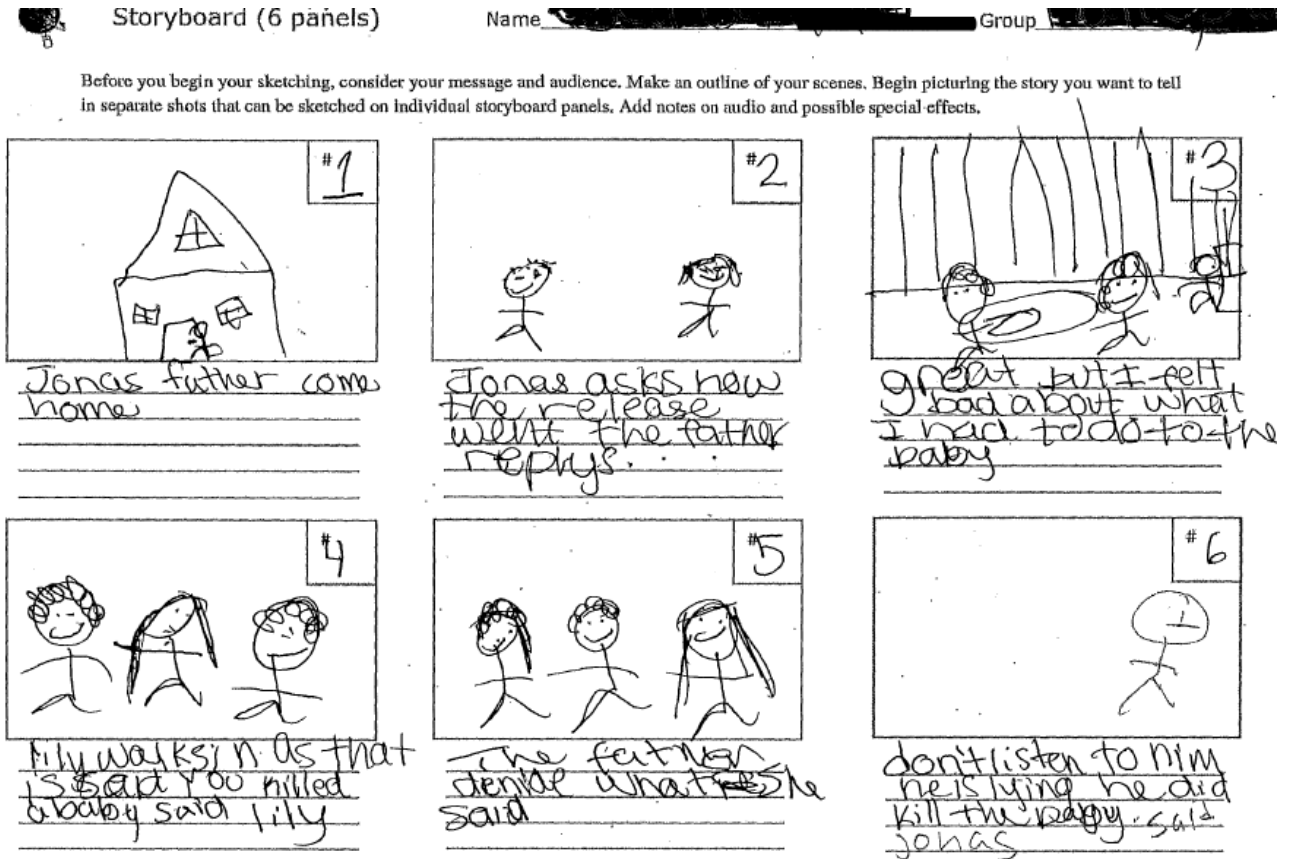


Figure 7. A completed Story Board created by a group of student from Mrs. Greene's class during a Table Read session.

In the spirit of collaboration, Mrs. Wells from Colorado also described adding an innovative spin on her students' guidelines for the Table Read:

I made up this paper where they had to say three things everyone did and three things everyone didn't do that you wanted to include...They had to include everything that everyone included. So, for example, everybody included a fight, so there had to be a fight in your scene. But not everyone included Lily and that was a really good idea, so some had Lily enter the scene randomly. So that was cool, they liked that a lot. That was a fun one. —Mrs. Wells

Mrs. Wells' and Mrs. Greene's choices to extend the Table Read provides insight into how the activity is designed with flexible intentionality that invites educators to feel comfortable modifying the lesson to best attend to her classroom's specific learning goals.

3 The Big Premiere

The third sequential step of the Storyteller's LAW requires each team from the Table Read groups to publically present their products to a larger audience (in the case of *The Giver Project*, this audience was the classroom). Simply identified as *The Big Premiere*, we designed this activity with the explicit purpose of offering an opportunity for learners to share their creative ideas with a greater community, or—as those in the entertainment industry may describe it—to conduct a test screening to gauge audience reactions. Researchers have identified a positive relationship between the promotion of social skills in school and students' academic achievement (Payton et al., 2008; Wentzel, 1991; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). My development of The Big Premiere in the Storyteller's LAW is inspired by research on strengthening students' classroom relationships, and by other findings that link desirable academic outcomes with students' friendly relationships with their classmates (Wentzel, 1991). The act of presenting assumes that youth are making themselves vulnerable to a community of peers or critics; therefore, it is important to establish a learning environment where peers respectfully engage with each other and with each other's work. This is important because a respectful classroom climate, particularly in middle schools, can prevent social behaviors that lead to negative consequences like suspensions, expulsions, or school dropout (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger., 2011; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2003).

Below is an excerpt from Mrs. Moore's class where, for The Big Premiere, a group of four students acts out the scene they had collaboratively developed during the Table Read.

This examples shows us how a team of four student writers collaborated to come to a consensus on how Jonas, the lead character of *The Giver*, would react to the knowledge that his father occasionally euthanizes babies as part of his employment duties.

80 (04:39) **Student (Jonas):** You lied about your day being fine [inaudible].
81 (04:44) **Student (Father):** No, all those days were fine.
82 (04:46) **Student (Lily):** Father, you lied?
83 (04:50) **Student (Mother):** Lily, I think it's time we headed upstairs.
84 (04:53) **Student (Jonas):** Leave now. I hate you Father, you don't love any of us.
85 (05:00) **Student (Father):** Jonas, do you want to be released?
86 (05:02) **Student (Jonas):** How could you say that? You're my father.
87 (05:06) **Student (Lily):** I can hear you.
88 (05:14) **Student (Father):** We are assigned, we are not true family.
89 (05:16) **Student (Jonas):** I should have stayed with the Giver. I should have never left.
90 (05:21) **Student (Loudspeaker):** Attention everyone. No noise pollution.
91 (05:24) **Student (Jonas):** Father, the speaker is telling you to calm down.
92 (05:27) **Student (Father):** No, he's telling you.
93 (05:28) **Student (Jonas):** I hate you and this community. I'm never coming back.
94 (05:31) **Student (Lily):** I can still hear you.
95 (05:37) **Student (Father):** Leave.
96 (05:38) **235Teacher:** Okay, nice job. |
97 [Applause.]
98 (05:47) **235Teacher:** Okay, here we go.
99 (05:51) **Student (Narrator):** As Jonas comes home from a bike ride, he threw his bike against
100 the bike rack. He goes into the house raging.
101 (05:57) **Student (Jonas):** I hate this community.
102 (05:59) **Student (Mother):** Jonas, what's wrong?
103 (06:02) **Student (Jonas):** Father's what's wrong. He killed a baby.

Figure 8. Transcript excerpt from students acting out a scene during The Big Premiere in Mrs. Moore's class in North Carolina.

As we can see in the excerpt above, Mrs. Moore's students presented their own creative extensions of what would happen if the lead character, Jonas, were to confront his father for "releasing" babies. Each group was given time to present, with no interruption from their peers or teacher, and then, following brief applause (Line 97), the next group jumped into action to present. During each presentation, the audience was asked to take notes that were later relayed as feedback for their classmates. This is but one example for how a teacher can manage in-class presentations of content.

When evaluating the educational utility of The Big Premiere in the Storyteller's LAW, teachers in *The Giver Project* tended to highlight its social properties. This perspective was captured well during our interview with Mrs. O'Hara who described feeling surprised by her students' willingness to be vulnerable in front of their whole class by courageously overcoming shy tendencies:

It helps kids who would normally be shy and nervous about it kind of go for it...sometimes sixth graders can be sarcastic. They don't take things seriously. But they were really invested in their work. They took some big emotional risks in front of one another, which I thought was really nice. 'Cause that's a really uncomfortable thing to do, to act and perform and try to really seem upset. I was really surprised with how much the students went there. —Mrs. O'Hara

When pressed to elaborate on her students' participation in The Big Premiere step of the Storyteller's LAW, Mrs. O'Hara explained that the scaffolded nature of the Storyteller's LAW may have enable the adolescents in her classroom to develop confidence in their work and in their presentations:

[During the Table Read], we went around and shared [students' individual writing], and then we went into the scene. You know, one day and then the next day we did the scenes. I think that really

helped the kids, too, where they could kind of build up their bravery to get in front of each other. But they love watching each other!—Mrs. O'Hara

Mrs. Greene also praised the activity for fostering a sense of comradery among her students:

They loved doing the play. I thought that was just a great activity that they come up with on their own, they come together and come up with their own consensus on ok we're working together, let's pull a play together.—Mrs. Greene

The comments here reflect how a scaffolded, yet intentionally autonomous sequence of creative acts may serve as an engaging method for building social relationships among peers which leads to a positive classroom climate, while also attending to academic standards necessitated by school curricula.

4 Critic's Choice

The final step of the Storyteller's LAW sequence invites students to engage in a critique of the content their peers presented during The Big Premiere. The Critic's Choice is intended to offer youth space to reflect upon the work of others in their small and large groups, as well as upon their own work, in an effort to affirm, enhance, and continue to extend the creative artifact. The participants in *The Giver Project* specifically relied upon their classroom space as the venue for the Critic's Choice; students' live presentations were audio-recorded and then immediately followed by a whole-class discussion that specifically invited students to compare the content of their peers' scenes and to consider how they may view the characters' action differently after viewing a variety of possible endings. These post-production discussions gave students in the study chances to provide constructive feedback to their peers using evidence from the original text, as well as classmates' innovative extensions of that text.

The teachers did not tend to specifically reflect on Critic's Choice step of the Storyteller's LAW. However, during *The Giver Project* I collected audio-recordings of the classroom discussions that took place during this stage. Presented here is an excerpt from the whole-class conversation that took place immediately following The Big Premiere in Mrs. Moore's class:

- 132 (07:21) **Student (Jonas):** No, Father, you didn't.
- 133 (07:24) **Student (Narrator):** Jonas starts crying quietly.
- 134 (07:26) **Student (Jonas):** One day you'll understand.
- 135 (07:30) **Student (Father):** I request you specify.
- 136 (07:32) **Student (Jonas):** I apologize. I cannot.
- 137 (07:34) **Student (Narrator):** Jonas exits. Father, now quietly talking to himself, muttering.
- 138 (07:39) **Student (Father):** I accept your apology.
- 139 (07:42) **235Teacher:** Great job everybody.
- 140 [Applause.]
- 141 (07:46) **235Teacher:** Alright. Now, comes the point where we are going to talk about, after
142 viewing all of these different versions, and after noticing how he reacts to his father when he
143 goes home after he's spent the night with the Giver, do you think differently about how Jonas
144 reacts? And go ahead, please.
- 145 (08:13) **Student:** Alright. I definitely think differently now cause I feel like it went from Davis,
146 being pretty calm about it, to JR, raging. And I feel like Tyler, Quaid, Abigail and [inaudible]'s
147 group was in between, and so was our group, I guess. I mean, it wasn't that loud. And then your
148 group was not that intense and their group wasn't that intense, but there was definitely a fine line
149 in between each group.
- 150 (08:40) **Student:** Our group had a rap. So..
- 151 (08:42) **Student:** Yeah, I know...
- 152 (08:42) **Student:** And their own way of specifying.
- 153 (08:44) **Student:** Yeah, I know. I just, I think now I sort of think about it as if he did go home.
154 Jonas, after hearing it, I feel like he would be more like Davis' group and quiet about it. And
155 wouldn't really say anything about it and wouldn't really yell, "I hate you," or flip chairs or
156 anything. After hearing it, how it sounds, it just does not sound like... even if I knew something
157 that somebody didn't know or someone knew that I didn't know. Like, I knew something and
158 somebody else didn't know that I knew that, I wouldn't be like, "How could you do that?" I'd just

Figure 9. Transcript excerpt of a classroom discussion immediately following The Big Premiere presentations in Mrs. Moore's North Carolina classroom.

This transcript contains evidence of high-quality dialogic interactions. For example, the students retain interpretive authority (Mayer, 2012) by respectfully speaking to each other with minimal interruption from the teacher. Further, at least one student discloses that his peers' The Big Premiere encouraged him to change his thinking about the motivations and outcomes of the characters (Line 145). The students respectfully build upon each other's utterances in an effort to thoughtfully synthesize The Big Premiere. This excerpt also offers evidence of evaluative thinking, use of examples to illustrate points, and a willingness to adopt new perspectives. Beyond a discourse analysis point of view, one could argue that this excerpt demonstrates that youth are critically analyzing plot, character motivations, and a whole host of other literary elements.

PART THREE

A Literature Review on Dialogic Instruction, Constructionism, & Fanfiction

My findings from *The Giver Project* indicated that all of the seven participating teachers in the sample positively evaluated each step in the sequence of activities presented in the Storyteller's LAW. In Part Two of this paper, I offered excerpts from classroom discussions, students' writing, and teacher interviews to contextualize educators' rationales for praising the Storyteller's LAW. However, after reviewing these data, I still questioned why this sequence of activities was received so well across the variety of classroom participants in *The Giver Project*. What was it about this instructional approach that contributed to its appeal? In order to fully analyze the complex pedagogical properties presented by the Storyteller's

LAW, and to generate a hypothesis for the instructional approach's popularity among teachers and students in *The Giver Project*, I identified three existing pedagogical frameworks to explain the success of the Storyteller's LAW. In this section, I take a brief detour from my discussion of the evidence relevant to the Storyteller's LAW, and move to the conceptual underpinnings of three distinctly different pedagogical frameworks: 1) dialogic instruction, 2) constructionism, and 3) Fanfiction.

Dialogic Instruction

Dialogic Instruction is a pedagogical approach that relies on learners' verbal interactions as the central mechanism of instruction. Education researchers have used a variety of terms to label this approach (e.g., classroom talk, instructional conversations, dilemma discussions, dialogic inquiry, academic discussion, etc.); yet no matter its label, the instructional styles are all rooted in the notion that enabling students to freely talk to each other has a direct and positive effect on learning. These instructional approaches are inspired by the work of a collection of theorists who have described *talk* as a social mechanism that serves as a vehicle for the co-construction of knowledge among multiple individuals (Bakhtin, 1981 & 1984; Piaget, 1976; Vygotsky, 1981; Wertsch, 1991). In a recent study (Elizabeth, 2014), fourteen scholars dedicated to the study of classroom talk offered their definitions of *dialogic instruction*, and the commonalities were synthesized to develop the following description of the construct:

[Dialogic Instruction] will look different, given the needs and resources of each teacher and school.

Across any context, educators can view classroom discussion as a discourse-based instructional format—that occurs for more than thirty seconds, yet less than one hour—in which students engage with each other to co-construct deeper understandings of content matter. Discussions can take place in

pairs, small groups, or whole class. The crux is that students are allowed the freedom to develop ideas with minimal interjection from the teacher. (Elizabeth, 2014, p. 36)

Elizabeth (2014) found that all instructional formats that are intended to be dialogic in nature—across a variety of participation structures (pair talk, small groups, whole class, etc.)—share significant attributes of high-quality talk that attend to youth’s socio-academic growth. For instance, during student-dominated dialogic instruction, it is common for the teacher or facilitator to pose an initial reflective prompt or open-ended discussion question for groups of learners to explore. The students are in control of the flow of their dialogue and engage with each other to co-construct deeper understandings of content matter.

Classroom-based dialogic interactions can take place in pairs, small groups, or whole class; what is most important is that students are allowed the flexibility to generate their own creative ideas with minimal direction from the teacher. Scholars tend to agree that teachers need to take a metaphorical backseat during these discussions in order to maximize students’ learning potential (Mayer, 2009, 2012; Reznitskaya, 2013). Within this pedagogical framework, discourse scholars have introduced the concept of *interpretive authority* as an opportunity for students to autonomously explore ideas and to formulate independent conclusions about academic content (Mayer, 2009; Mercer, Wegerif, & Dawes, 1999). For instance, in her research on classroom talk patterns, Mayer (2009) found that in high-quality K–12 dialogic classrooms, it is common for the possession of interpretive authority to fluctuate from the teacher to the students, and back again. As reported in Elizabeth’s (2014) interview study, experts “suggested that the most logical way for educators to shift interpretive authority to students is to introduce the conversation with an open-ended prompt that invites curiosity and reflection” (p. 15). The experts interviewed in this study also emphasized the role of open-ended questions that do not have a definitive solution or

answer as critical to students' development of exploratory thinking. Discourse researchers (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991) coined the term "authentic question" to describe such open-ended questions presumed to be a foundational pedagogical tenet to dialogic instruction.

How does Dialogic Instruction contribute to socioacademics?

Dialogic instruction has been widely accepted by philosophers and theorists as a method for promoting critical thinking, democratic engagement, and perspective taking among learners (Dewey, 1966; Habermas, 1990). In the last twenty years, education researchers have carried these theories into the classroom by experimenting with peer-dialogue as an instructional method in which students engage in conversations that are intended to bolster their understanding of academic content (Cazden, 2001; Halliday, 1993). More recently, studies have suggested that discussion-based lessons are associated with reading comprehension skills (Lawrence, Crosson, Paré-Blagoev, & Snow, 2015; Snow, Lawrence, & White, 2009) as well as collaborative methods to promote analytic reasoning skills (Mercer, Wegerif, & Dawes, 1999; Michaels, O'Connor, & Resnick, 2008) that transfer to higher levels of overall academic achievement among students. Furthermore, the academic utility of dialogic instruction was publically acknowledged when The Common Core State Standards (2016) introduced a *Speaking and Listening* component focused on developing students' oral reasoning skills. It is the position of the Common Core State Standards (2016) that these speaking and listening competencies will prepare students for complex literacy demands required in college, the workforce, and other arenas of adult life, including those that require social and civic engagements.

A recent large-scale curriculum study demonstrated that a discussion- and debate-centered curriculum assists in the development of middle school students' analytic reasoning, academic language, and perspective taking competencies (Jones et al., under review;

Duhaylongsod, Snow, Selman, & Donovan, 2015). The results of this study reinforces findings from Elizabeth’s (2014) interview study that identified dialogic instruction as a powerful tool that allows students to critically analyze their own ideas, as well as ideas presented by texts and classmates. Table 2 below presents a list of the seven most highly referenced *academic, social, and classroom climate related* benefits of discussion as cited by the scholars of dialogic instruction I interviewed (Elizabeth, 2014):

Table 2 — Academic, Social, & Climate Benefits of Dialogic Instruction

Academic Benefits	Social Benefits	Classroom Climate Benefits
1. Leads to higher levels of learning	1. Models healthy communication	1. Creates a respectful classroom community
2. Promotes comprehension of content	2. Teaches active listening	2. Students learn that their ideas matter
3. Exercises critical thinking	3. Allows students to practice disagreeing politely	3. Students feel valued by their teacher and peers
4. Develops argumentation skills	4. Promotes empathy and perspective taking	4. Fosters a safe place to challenge and be challenged
5. Bolsters memory	5. Regulates emotional responses and affect	5. Sets the tone that meanness is not accepted
6. Prepares students for college	6. Prepares students for adulthood	6. Enables students to get to know each other
7. Serves as a precursor to writing activities	7. Fosters responsible citizens	7. Promotes friendships

As shown in Table 2, dialogic instruction is a socioacademic approach that can be applied to a variety of grade levels (e.g., K–12 and beyond) and content areas (English Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, etc.).

Constructionism

Seymour Papert, M.I.T. Professor of Mathematics and founder of the Artificial Intelligence Lab, first introduced *constructionism* as a theory of learning and instruction to describe how practices in social psychology and experiential learning can be combined to teach children computer programming skills. Constructionist practices are rooted in social theories similar to those of dialogic instruction, given the common premise that the co-

construction of knowledge across learners is an effective way to build social understandings (Bakhtin, 1981; Piaget, 1976; Vygotsky, 1981) and solidify content knowledge. In the context of his pioneering work on “digital technology,” Papert (1980) asserted that providing a self-directed learning environment and adequate materials to explore will enable children to contemplate different methods of thinking (p. 83) and learning (p. 84). Papert described children as naturally dichotomous problem-solvers; he found that they tend to believe that there is either a “right” or a “wrong” answer to any given puzzle (1980, p. 84). To avoid this type of dichotomous thinking, he suggested that children be encouraged to engage in systematic problem-solving strategies that allow them to view their mistakes as mere glitches in a system that can be solved through trial and error, rather than as failures that are indicative of a flaw in intelligence or personal ability (1980, p. 84). Interestingly, while this theory of learning is widely attributed to the founding of *constructionism*, Papert and his colleagues were reluctant to directly assign a definition to the term. They argued that to assert a definition would be counter to its very philosophical grounding. They distinguished between *constructionism* and *constructivism*, Piaget’s theory of logical development, by saying that while both regard the notion of learning as the act of building knowledge structures, the former allows for a context where the learner self-direct to construct a product that can be viewed by or shared with others (Papert & Harel, 1991).

Despite Papert and Harel’s (1991) reluctance to assign constructionism theory a formal definition, the original notion of constructionism has since been defined by other education theorists. For example, Beisser (2005) defines constructionism as:

...a theory of learning based on two different notions of construction of knowledge. First, it is grounded on the idea that children learn by actively constructing new knowledge, not by having information dispensed to them. Second, constructionism asserts that effective learning takes place

when the learner is engaged in constructing personally meaningful artifacts using manipulatives such as creating computer animations, robots, plays, poems, icons, objects, or pictures representing one's own learning. (pp. 9–10).

In her dissertation work at MIT, Brennan (2013a) described constructionism as founded by four pillars—*designing, personalizing, sharing, and reflecting* (p. 46)—and urged educators to adopt these practices in K–12 schooling. In *Designing*, Brennan suggests that design thinking and making with digital technologies need to be more prevalent in schools (p. 49). With *Personalizing*, Brennan asserts that learning experiences should cater to an individual learner's interests and needs by capturing his or her intrinsic motivation to learn (pp. 50–51). *Sharing*, she argues, is a critical facet of constructionism because it attends to the social nature of learning and allows students to communicate and ultimately learn from their peers (p. 52). Finally, Brennan describes *Reflecting* as a significant metacognitive process that enables the learner to deeply contemplate what they want to learn, why they want to learn it, what they can do to learn it, who can help them learn, and how their learning has evolved over time (p. 53).

Sawyer (2006) criticizes modern schooling for adhering to assumptions that 1) view youth as the memorizers of facts that are bestowed upon them by wise, all-knowing teachers, and 2) verify the adequacy of instruction by testing the number of facts a student has retained. Sawyer notes that these assumptions synthesize Papert's definition of "instructionism," and in today's world, instructionism is an outdated and overused educational method that does not properly equip learners for our "knowledge economy" (2006, p. 2). Instead, Sawyer argues that instructionism undermines the pedagogical potential of constructionism, and that students would benefit most from a deep conceptual understanding of constructs, an ability to think creatively, an opportunity to practice theory

building, and the possession of skills to both critically evaluate others and to express themselves through written and oral language.

Sawyer (2006) calls for teachers, parents, school administrators, policymakers, and education researchers to adopt constructionist practices in order to design engaging and effective learning environments. Perhaps the most urgent and passionate call for constructionist strategies to be incorporated into K–12 curricula is presented by Jha (2012) in a literature review on the theoretical underpinnings of constructionist pedagogy (pp. 174–177). He argues that current educational curricula are “dead,” in the sense that they do not excite the creative intellect of students, and therefore these curricula must be replaced by constructionist instructional strategies that are cultural or relational in foundation. The perspectives of Jha (2012), Sawyer (2006), Papert (1980), and Brennan (2013a) are aligned in that each of these instructional theorists recommend that K–12 educators adopt a constructionist approach that abstains from requiring students to memorize facts and instead allows students construct their own investigations of knowledge.

How does Constructionism contribute to socioacademics?

Nevertheless, only a small number of empirical studies exist to suggest that a constructionist approach is effective in K–12 formal and informal learning environments (e.g., classrooms, summer camp, after-school clubs). These studies—most of which have been conducted in the last decade, as constructionist theory has evolved into practice—tend to reference mathematics or computer science classes, yet some have findings that extend into literacy instruction. Constructionist strategies tend to include classroom projects where students are provided with time and resources to produce “something” that they will later share with their peers. This “something” ranges from interactive computer programs (Brennan, 2013b) to videogame design (Baytak & Land, 2011b) to digital storytelling (Burke

& Kafai, 2012) to e-textiles (Buchley & Eisenberg, 2008) to PowerPoint presentations (Barbour, Rieber, Thomas, & Rauscher, 2009). To better understand how this approach affects socioacademics, I will summarize studies that have examined both the *academic* and *social* implications of constructionist practices, in both formal and informal K–12 settings.

In a study designed to evaluate the effect of software design strategies on Fourth Graders’ understandings of fractions and computer programming, students were asked to create a computer program that could teach younger peers about fractions. The author (Harel, 1990) described the instructional approach as constructionist and found students in the treatment group—those who were encouraged to use software design—incorporated more sophisticated types of code into their programs and demonstrated faster debugging skills (p. 20). Harel also found that the treatment group developed better “cognitive flexibility,” meaning that the students demonstrated a keener ability to discard faulty code or designs and to search for more effective strategies and they demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of fractions than their control group peers (Harel, 1990, p. 28). In a more recent study in a middle school Computer Science course, Burke and Kafai (2012) evaluated a series of 11 constructionist mini-lessons they designed to teach different elements of literary composition (e.g., foreshadowing, setting scene, revising, etc.) using digital story examples from a children’s computer programming website called *Scratch*. All of the lessons included state government educational literacy standards and were reviewed by the school’s literacy specialist prior to implementation (Burke & Kafai, 2012, p. 434). Participating students were asked to participate in “gallery walks” where they shared and offered feedback on each other’s work, posted drafts of their digital stories to the Scratch website, and revised their work based on peer feedback.

According to Peppler and Kafai (2007), *creative production* “refers to youth’s designs of new media artifacts such as web pages, videogames, and more” (p. 150). Peppler and Kafai (2007) describe three ethnographic case studies of low-income minority adolescents who attend an out-of-school informal learning club in South Central Los Angeles as a way to demonstrate how constructionist education efforts have potential to emphasize the role of creative production and social dynamics in formal and informal learning environments. The authors argue that in order for youth to become critical participants in current media culture they need to not only know how to use, but how to *construct* and *design* new media (Peppler & Kafai, 2007, pp. 151–152). The authors conclude by noting that constructionist experiences allow youth to learn to be designers while reflecting on the larger media culture at the same time (Peppler & Kafai, 2007, p. 162).

Recently, Schifter and Cipollone (2015) observed three groups of high school students over the course of five English Literature class sessions within a two-week period of time, as the youth collaborated using the videogame *Minecraft* to develop films as a way to demonstrate their understanding of literary concepts (plot, character development, mood, etc.) (p. 218). During their observations, the authors also observed how the teacher interacted with and supported students during their development of the films. Schifter and Cipollone (2015) found that high-school students effectively collaborated, through small group discussions, to develop *Minecraft* videos with strong plotlines and dynamic characters that represented their own abstract understandings of these literary elements beyond the confinements of a single work of literature (pp. 220–221). The researchers specifically described the teacher’s approach as constructionist in nature because he provided his students with the environment and materials they needed to construct and share their learning without imposing rules, strategies, or instruction (p. 223). The authors concluded

with the assertion that recent technologies, like that of *Minecraft*, provide students with opportunities to construct knowledge in meaningful ways and would thus be beneficial to everyday classroom instruction (Schifter & Cipollone, 2015, p. 225).

In summary, constructionism is a theory of learning nested in new media and digital technology that encourages educators to provide learners with opportunities to creatively build their own projects or educational artifacts, which are intended to be shared with and analyzed by their peers, as an engaging method for teaching critical thinking and content-specific skills. The principles of constructionist learning rely more on the *process* of peer collaboration than they do on technological resources; therefore, the approach is scalable without relatively costly technology, and can be applied in a variety of classroom settings—one class may use poster board and markers, another may create PowerPoint presentations, and another may design personal websites to essentially convey the same information. In this case, it is the learning process, not the medium, that matters.

Fanfiction

After my review of the literature, I would simply define fanfiction as *any written extension of an original piece of art by admirers of that art*. The boundaries and nuances of the phenomenon are vast, yet the public generally considers fanfiction to be works of fiction created to extend the narratives and plotlines of beloved television, movie, literature, graphic novel, or other entertainment media characters by the fans of these contents. As explained by media researcher Henry Jenkins (2009a), works of fanfiction can be viewed as “original stories and novels which are set in the fictional universe of an individual’s favorite television series, films, comics, games or other media properties” (para.1). As denoted by its name, fanfiction relies on devoted fans—not the original author—as self-assumed experts on a specific media source who generate, and curate, alternatives to original content. Fanfiction

stories tend to introduce creative spins on “adventures, mishaps, histories/futures, and locations for main characters, create ‘prequels’ for shows or movies, or realize previously non-existent relationships between characters” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 235).

Fanfiction analysts agree that, as long as fanfiction writers are true to the core values or “canon” of the original character, they are limited only by their imagination in developing new stories (Black, 2007a; Jenkins, 2009a; Kell, 2009; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).

With the rising popularity of personal websites, blogs, and creative-writing forums on the internet, fanfiction is now accepted as any type of creative extension of an original plot or cast of characters produced by a fan for entertainment purposes, as opposed to monetary profit. What was once a phenomenon dominated by adults is now populated by ambitious and prolific adolescents looking to extend the worlds of their favorite characters (Black, 2007a). Products of fanfiction can now be procured in both print (typically magazine or book) and digital (online) formats. Numerous websites exist to direct aspiring fanfiction authors to the online “rules of engagement” regarding popular terminology associated with fanfiction (e.g., “Badfic” is a term used to note that the author has deliberately used poor writing techniques in order to make a joke) as well as how to appropriately interact with the fanfiction website (e.g., stories that describe real people are not allowed). Not only is it common for fanfiction authors to share their works publically, typically as a member of a particular forum or website, but fanfiction culture also embraces a community where readers act not just as an audience, but as critics, editors, and mentors. In this fascinating subculture, fanfiction “forums allow individuals to share their areas of expertise and learn from their peers in areas of weaknesses” (Kell, 2009, p. 33). These communities embrace norms that allow for thoughtful praise, and require criticisms to be constructive and kind-hearted in nature (Black, 2005; Kell, 2009). This relationship between fanfiction authors and their

readers is well-illustrated by the *Fanfiction Terminology* website (Moonbeams Predilections, 2015), where the forum creator defines for its fellow fanfiction writers what it means to be a “beta reader:”

***Beta (-‘d, -read, or –reader)**—refers to having someone knowledgeable in writing etiquette edit a story prior to posting. While spell-checking a story can catch most simple mistakes, certain grammar faux-pas will be missed. A beta-reader can catch not only the technical errors, but is often useful as a sounding board for improving the story itself. Betas can fill in plotheoles, keep your characterizations on target, and help guide an author to new creative heights. Authors are fantastic and always appreciated, but betas make authors better and deserve some appreciation of their own.*

In her extended review of a popular online forum for fans, Black (2007a) identifies Fanfiction.net as an “affinity space” where contributors use “digital literacy skills to discover, discuss, and solve writing and reading-related problems, while at the same time pursuing the goals of developing social networks and affiliating with other fans” (p. 133). Both adult and adolescent “beta readers” who share common creative interests and a passion for extending their favorite media inhabit this interesting peer-review community. In my view, the beta-reader is one of many examples for how the practices enacted in fanfiction have socioacademic value. In the section below, I will explore what advocates of fanfiction have been saying about the potential benefits of integrating the practices of this youth subculture into K–12 education initiatives and what scholars of fanfiction have been discovering.

How does Fanfiction contribute to socioacademics?

Scholars interested in the relationship between *new media* (any content found online or on a digital media device) and *new literacy* (skills to evaluate online and digital content), and particularly those who study fanfiction, are increasingly pondering the potential that this engaging approach to literacy offers to those in search of methods for enhancing teaching

and learning in K–12 classrooms (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). Education researchers suggest that allowing students to connect their fascinations with popular media (e.g., films, comic books, chapter books, video games, etc.) to projects within the classroom is an effective way to solicit genuine engagement in academic activities. In a review of the literature, Black (2007a) notes that a common thread to emerge is the idea that fandom writing activities, or fanfiction, has the potential to be instrumental in developing students' motivation to develop reading and writing skills. For example, linguist and media expert James Paul Gee (2004) presented a case study to illustrate how one first-grader's interest in the Pokémon cartoon and videogame world helped motivate the child to learn to read and write. Capitalizing on his love of Pokémon, the child's parents and teachers successfully used gaming cards and character guides as incentive to encourage the reluctant reader to develop his literacy skills (Gee, 2004). In a study to examine teens' use of digital technologies for literacy-education purposes, Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) found that middle-school girls viewed writing fanfiction as a “way to have fun, exercise one's imagination, and avoid boredom.” Another student in their study even described fanfiction as a welcomed form of “stress relief” (p. 560). These findings suggest that fanfiction is potentially an effective way to solicit students' engagement in otherwise potentially dull academic settings.

Jenkins (2007) also advocates for fanfiction as an educational tool because the practice allows writers to “play with the rough spots of the text—its narrative gaps, its excess details, its loose ends and contradictions—in order to find openings for elaborations of its world and speculations about characters” (p. 74). Burns and Webber (2009) view fanfiction as an effective way to solicit authentic student engagement and they suggest that fanfiction allows young writers to “borrow” existing characters and ideas from other narratives in a way that allows them to focus their concentration on developing other competencies like

persuasive writing, analyzing plot, understanding tone and style, etc. (Burns & Webber, 2009, p. 29). These scholars also discuss the academic utility of the beta reader:

*In the world of fanfiction, editors are called **beta readers**, and it's their job to correct errors in grammar, spelling, characterization, plot, and dialog. The betas also make sure that writers get their canon straight. "Canon" refers to the facts and events portrayed in the source material: When is Percy Jackson's birthday?* (Burns & Webber, 2009, p. 29).

They recommend that educators host classroom discussions about the role of a beta reader, and consider what it means to be a helpful copyeditor of other students' stories. Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) also positioned fanfiction as an entry point for engaging students in discussions in Language Arts classrooms to "help students become more metacognitive about their compositions" (p. 564). When Kell (2009), a teacher and librarian from Georgia, implemented an exploratory fanfiction literacy effort in her middle school, she found that her students preferred to create fanfiction pieces over the development of generic (or original) creative writing topics. Further, Kell's students enjoyed the opportunity to assume the roles of "beta readers" and peer-edit their classmates' work, *and* they were receptive to the feedback they received from peers and were eager to make edits to improve their own writing (Kell, 2009).

Some evidence also exists to suggest that fanfiction opportunities can serve as avenues to help reluctant learners find a way to make sense of challenging subject matter. For instance, in a case study of a college student's struggle with English studies, Roozen (2009) found that allowing the hesitant learner to approach a topic about which she was less comfortable via the composition of fanfiction helped her to personally relate to and understand the academic content. In an interview study (Roozen, 2009), a participant reported that she often created fanfiction in high school as a personal strategy to help her

feel invested in books she read for English class. This report is reminiscent of findings from earlier study of what motivates adolescents to read. Scholars interviewed middle school students and found evidence that “when faced with a selection of unfamiliar texts, youth often used elements of popular culture (e.g., movies, television shows, musicians) to establish connections” (Birr Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008, p. 137). These researchers noted that while the students did not explicitly refer to fanfiction as the strategy they were using to overcome literacy challenges, their methods to creatively extend the plotlines of popular films and television shows greatly resembled that of fanfiction composition.

Researchers have also found some indication that participating in the composition of fanfiction can benefit English Language Learners’ vocabulary and fluency. In her research on the ways in which adolescents participate in online fanfiction forums, sociocultural linguist Rebecca Black (2005) found that through composing and posting works online, many second language learners practice the development of both their English writing skills and social interactions. Specifically, in her studies of Chinese and Japanese speakers learning English, Black (2005) found that “...there are a great many English-language learners (ELLs) who are also writing, posting, and reviewing fictions in English in these online fanfiction communities” (p. 118). As is common in the fanfiction world, these ELL writers would add notes to their readers requesting leniency for spelling and grammar mistakes. For example, Black (2005) found that the beta readers “will explicitly respond to an [ELL] author’s request that readers ‘Please excuse my grammar and spelling errors, because English is my second language’ and will offer support and encouragement to continue writing (p. 125). Further, ELL authors oftentimes requested clarification from their native-English speaking audience about norms of the English language. Responses to these inquiries “provide ELLs with

direct access to many native speakers' knowledge of spelling and grammar. This sort of specified feedback helps to scaffold ELLs' success with using their English literacy skills to compose in this space" (Black, 2005, p. 125).

As suggested in the previous paragraphs, fanfiction in formal learning environments can be leveraged as a social tool that builds classroom climate and positive peer relationships (ChandlerOlcott & Mahar, 2003). Yet this educative exchange can also be seen in informal learning environments, like online communities, where youth who are strangers unite to support each other's writing (Burns & Webber, 2009). This prosocial element was evidenced in the work of ChandlerOlcott and Mahar (2003), who in their interviews with adolescents found that:

...fanfiction writing also helped to develop and solidify relationships with various friends, online or otherwise. Whether they were sharing their texts with each other—or, as was the case with some of Rhiannon's stories, writing their friends into the narratives in a more literal sense—fanfics appeared to serve as "social glue." (ChandlerOlcott & Mahar, 2003, p. 560).

These researchers suggest that fanfiction helps to develop a socioacademic community of writers that unite across age, gender, race, ethnicity, etc. Enthusiasm for a particular narrative unites these creative writing groups in ways that are rare, yet powerful. As explained by Burns and Webber (2009), "Writing and posting fanfiction also encourages positive interactions and feedback among folks who might not otherwise meet. Indeed, the genre requires an active community to survive" (p. 28). Whether these positive interactions are experienced inside or outside the walls of a classroom, composing fanfiction, and then sharing that work with a greater community, helps to develop what Jenkins and colleagues (2009b) refer to as a *participatory culture*.

A culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of information mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at least they care what other people think about what they have created. (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009, p. 5)

Beyond the interactive social benefit, options for creativity and collaboration within fanfiction are limitless. While empirical investigations into the use of fanfiction for educational purposes are limited, these studies suggest that drawing upon learners' *informal* knowledge (i.e., exposure to movies, videogames, fiction books, etc.) in a *formal* education setting (i.e., a classroom or afterschool tutoring session) through the use of fanfiction is an effective way to solicit and retain students' engagement and participation in K–12 education settings.

PART FOUR

The Storyteller's LAW: Dialogic Instruction, Constructionism, & Fanfiction

The theoretical detour I offered in Part Three of this paper provides a conceptual frame for understanding why the Storyteller's LAW worked so well in practice. In the following sections, I will revisit each step of this innovative curricular approach, and contextualize how its properties reflect elements of Dialogic Instruction, Constructionism, and Fanfiction.

Analysis of Story-writing

In Table 3 below, I highlight the dialogic, constructionist, and fanfiction principles that are present in *Story-writing*, Step 1 in the Storyteller’s LAW.

Table 3 — Story-writing

Activity Title	Description	Giver Example
1 Story-writing (Writing)	After being exposed to a suspenseful (cliffhanger or turning-point) moment in the story (book, film, video game, play, etc.), students individually write an extension or resolution of the scene. This extension can take any form of creative writing (book chapter, film scene, television script, blog entry, etc.) approved by the teacher.	<i>Imagine that Jonas went home after witnessing his father “release” the baby. Use your imagination to write a scene of the story that shows how Jonas approaches his father about the release. What would Jonas say? How would Father react? How would this conversation affect other members of the family?</i>
DIALOGIC	Students will... (This activity is a precursor to a discussion.) -Draw upon data from a text to formulate a written argument that can be used as fodder in a discussion or debate. - Use evidence and reasons to support ideas.	
CONSTRUCTIONIST	Students will... -Engage in a self-directed learning exercise that encourages imaginative thinking. -Begin to develop content or an artifact that will later be shared with peers. -Be intrinsically motivated to engage in the learning experience because it caters to the individual’s interests and creative preferences.	
FANFICTION	Students will... -Extend the storyline of an original text. -Use imagination to experiment with different character thoughts and behaviors. -Draft a creative new spin on an old story.	

This first step in the Storyteller’s LAW incorporates practices from both fanfiction and constructionism, and is a writing precursor to the academic discussion that will take place in the *Table Read*. Story-writing begins the process of what constructionists would classify as *designing* (Brennan, 2013a), or as researchers Peppler and Kafai (2007) describe as *creative production*, which “refers to youth’s designs and implementations of new media artifacts such as web pages, videogames, and more” (p. 150). In order for youth to become critical participants in current media culture they need to not only know how to *use* media,

but also how to *construct* and *design* media (Peppler & Kafai, 2007, pp. 151–152). While these researchers were envisioning content that would eventually be transferred to a digital space, the same learning goals can be achieved if students in this step simply write using pen and paper or a type using word processing software. Additionally, Story-writing is the same exercise that a fan would engage in when developing their fanfiction to be published to an internet forum. The medium on which the content is drafted is less relevant than the methods the author uses to generate that content. In this case, student writers are adhering to scholars' criteria of fanfiction because they are assuming the role of guest authors who honor, yet imaginatively extend an original canon to include new storylines and character experiences (Black, 2007a; Jenkins, 2009; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Shifter & Cippelone, 2015).

Analysis of Table Read

In Table 4 below, I highlight the dialogic, constructionist, and fanfiction principles that are present in the *Table Read* step of the Storyteller's LAW.

Table 4 – Table Read

Activity Title	Description	Giver Example
2 Table Read (Small-group Discussion)	<i>Small groups of students gather to share their Story-writings. They collaborate to develop a single, cohesive product that will be publically presented to their peers. The sophistication of the public presentation will depend on the time and resources available to the class.</i>	<i>Divide students into small groups of 2–3. Ask them to take turns sharing their newly written story scene. After each member in the group has had an opportunity to share, encourage students to discuss the similarities and differences they imagined for the scene.</i>
DIALOGIC	<i>Students will...</i> <i>-Engage in small-group discussion.</i> <i>-Practice speaking and listening skills while sharing stories.</i> <i>-Respectfully agree and disagree to generate new and shared ideas.</i> <i>-Use perspective-taking and self-regulation to collaborate on a final product.</i>	

CONSTRUCTIONIST	<i>Students will...</i> -Engage in a self-directed learning exercise that encourages imaginative thinking. -Personalize content to reflect his or her own creative interests. -Construct a written artifact that can be viewed by or shared with others.
FANFICTION	<i>Students will...</i> -Collaborate with a community of peers to “borrow” existing characters and ideas from other narratives. -Practice competencies like persuasive writing, analyzing plot, understanding tone and style, etc. -Act as beta-readers to review and edit peers’ work for accuracy and consistency. -Be members of a participatory culture where creative ideas are valued and contribute to collaborative learning.

The Table Read is driven predominately by facets of dialogic instruction to promote socioacademic learning, yet the activity also incorporates some elements of constructionism and fanfiction which contribute to the greater pedagogical approach of the Storyteller’s LAW. In respect to dialogic instruction, the Table Read relies on students’ engagement in a small-group discussion, with an expectation that the experience will allow students to practice social skills like active listening, respectful disagreement, perspective taking, and compromise, all of which are indicators of high-quality dialogic engagement that are conducive to academic competencies like text comprehension, critical thinking, argumentation, and subject-matter retention (Elizabeth, 2014). This exchange of creative ideas will solicit students’ enthusiasm for, and therefore authentic engagement in the learning experience.

The Table Read positions youth to hold each other accountable for generating tone, style, and character development conceivably appropriate for original canon of the media content that are creatively extending (Burns & Webber, 2009). This exercise gives students practice acting as peer-reviewers- or what the fanfiction world refers to as *beta-readers*—who edit their classmates’ content and then collaborate to develop an educational artifact. The

Table Read provides students membership into a community of writers, and in this safe educational space students workshop creative ideas while being held accountable to the integrity of the original text. Additionally, the collaborative exercise leverages creativity and writing as a method for building relationships between peers that may not otherwise exist within the learning environment. In the case example from *The Giver Educator's Resource*, the learning environment is a physical classroom; however, this space can be any environment where learners meet in person or a digital forum where learners collaborate online (Kell, 2009).

The dialogic and fanfiction collaboration elements of the Table Read also contribute to Jenkins and his colleagues' (2009) conceptions of a *participatory culture* because the activity allows for an environment where students "believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created)" (p. 3). The Table Read is one example of how youth who belong to a participatory culture are allowed to adjust the primary academic focus of the educational task, which in this case literacy, "from one of individual expression to community involvement" (Jenkins et al., 2009, p. 7). This relationship between academic and social learning is echoed by ChandlerOlcott and Mahar (2003), whose research suggests that bringing elements of fanfiction into a formal learning space like a classroom will foster social relationships among peers in ways that contribute to a greater overall prosocial classroom climate. The Table Read allows students to engage socially to accomplish an academic goal.

Constructionist philosophers would also credit the Table Read for contributing to a learning environment where learners are offered the freedom to construct or direct their own understanding of content in an autonomous, yet collaborative way. Specifically, the activity includes at least two of Brennan's (2013a) four pillars of constructionist learning:

personalizing and *sharing*. The act of writing with few rules or creative boundaries enables students to manipulate their narratives in ways that are *personalized* and allow youth to develop specific imaginative interests; this freedom of expression triggers students' intrinsic motivation to learn and complete the assignment. The Table Read also allows students to *share* their work, a communicative act that enables peers to socially engage and learn from each other. One could also argue that the activity also incorporates Brennan's (2013a) vision of *designing* because youth are able to generate and modify their own creative products.

Analysis of The Big Premiere

As outlined in Table 5 below, The Big Premiere step of the Storyteller's LAW encompasses a balance of practices from dialogic instruction, constructionism, and fanfiction to promote socioacademic learning.

Table 5 – The Big Premiere

Activity Title	Description	Giver Example
3 The Big Premiere (Actor's Studio)	<i>Each team of Table Read Authors will publically present their peers. How "publicly" these products will be presented is at the teacher's discretion. For example, students may post their products to a class bulletin board; submit to an online blog or website; present a live performance in class; post a pre-recorded video of the production to an online site; prepare a formal PowerPoint, etc.</i>	<i>First, in their small groups, give students 10 minutes to synthesize their ideas and develop a collaborative scene from the story that depicts Jonas' reaction to Father. Next, allow groups to volunteer to act out their scene for the class.</i>
DIALOGIC	<i>Students will...</i> -Practice speaking and listening skills while sharing stories. -Nod, smile, use eye contact, and other non-verbal indicators of engagement. -Use evidence, reasons, and examples to describe ideas. -Present lengthy and complex utterances.	
CONSTRUCTIONIST	<i>Students will...</i> -Construct a written artifact that can be viewed by or shared with others. -Creatively communicate with and ultimately learn from their peers. -Critically evaluate the work of peers. -Express themselves through written and oral language.	
FANFICTION	<i>Students will...</i> -Publically present an artifact to an audience using whatever means encouraged by the teacher (a class bulletin board, school folder, internet website, etc.). -Act as beta-readers to review and edit peers' work for accuracy and consistency. -Participate in a culture where creative ideas are valued and contribute to collaborative learning.	

From a constructionist perspective, The Big Premiere offers youth an opportunity to publically share artifacts with their learning community (Papert, 1980; Brennan, 2013a). I join constructionist theorists in the assumption that subtle social pressure to create and present a respectable artifact will inspire students to conduct their best academic work. The Big Premiere does not necessarily need to be evaluated based on what is good or bad, right or wrong, but on the effort the student contributed to the final product. As I show in the next section, the final step of the Storyteller's LAW relieves pressure from teachers to grade

assignments and instead allows that responsibility to fall on to the student-community of learners. For example, in the case presented by *The Giver Project*, acting out a book or film scene is an informal strategy to solicit peer feedback in regards to academic knowledge (e.g., plot, character development, setting, etc.). The very act of presenting a creative artifact to be evaluated by a greater audience is the crux of fanfiction. Publically sharing content to be enjoyed by, yet evaluated by, peers with similar creative interests is what Black (2007a) describes as contributing to an “affinity space” (p. 133). During this process, adolescents consume peer-created content that they will later modify or critique as a friendly audience of mentors and possibly coauthors (Kell, 2009). The Big Premiere is a social act that provides youth with a chance to share with their learning community; the activity is designed to keep students motivated to participate in an educational activity.

Analysis of Critic’s Choice

As outlined in Table 6 below, the Critic’s Choice in the Storyteller’s LAW intertwines properties of dialogic instruction with constructionism and fanfiction to promote socioacademic learning.

Table 6 – Critic’s Choice

Activity Title	Description	Giver Example
<p style="text-align: center;">4 Critic’s Choice (Media Discussion)</p>	<p>Following The Big Premiere, peers from the class (or a larger learning community), will be invited to publically reflect upon the products by offering feedback, ideas for extensions, constructive criticism, etc. Before participating in the Critic’s Choice, all students should read and/or view the concluding scene as presented by the narrative’s original author, as well as at least one additional professionally published form of the text (i.e., read the book <i>and</i> watch the movie).</p>	<p><i>After each group has acted out their scene, engage students in a whole class discussion about the different reactions Jonas may have had. Encourage students to consider: After seeing your classmates’ interpretation of this scene, do you think differently about how Jonas reacts to Father? Why or why not?</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">DIALOGIC</p>	<p><i>Students will...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Engage in large-group discussion. -Ask open-ended questions of his or her peers. -Practice speaking and listening skills while sharing stories. -Nod, smile, use eye contact, and other non-verbal indicators of engagement. -Respectfully agree or disagree to generate new and shared ideas. -Use perspective-taking and self-regulation to collaborate on a final product. 	
<p style="text-align: center;">CONSTRUCTIONIST</p>	<p><i>Students will...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Present an artifact that can be viewed by or shared with others. -Express themselves through written and oral language -Reflect on what he or she has learned during the process so far. -Establish new personal learning goals. -Contemplate how he or she can accomplish new learning goals. -Critically, yet kindly, evaluate and offer feedback on peers’ work. -Extend one’s own work based on peer critique. 	
<p style="text-align: center;">FANFICTION</p>	<p><i>Students will...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Be members of a <i>participatory culture</i> of writers -Publically post their work for a community of peers to critique (website, school internal server, class Google folder, classroom bulletin board, etc.). -Act not just as an audience, but as critics, editors, and mentors for peers. -Share areas of expertise and learn from their peers in areas of weakness. -Act as beta readers (or copyeditors) of his or her peers’ stories and artifacts. -Evaluate how adequately a story or artifact honors the original author’s canon. 	

This Critic’s Choice draws on the shared practice advocated by constructionists and fanfiction authors to comment upon peers’ public productions of creative work. It serves as

a concrete instance of Brennan's (2013a) description of *reflecting* as the experience that offers youth time and space to consider peer feedback in order to modify and enhance their work. Further, the act of offering peers with feedback—which may be as general as commenting on a character's clothing to as specific as commenting on the writers' use of a word or phrase—is akin to the role of a beta-reader in fanfiction. It is important for both teachers and students to remember that the Critic's Choice exercise is most productive when reviewers honor a code to generate both respectful and well-intentioned criticisms (Black, 2005; Kell, 2009). In order for youth to engage in a respectful review of their peers' work, they are required to practice speaking and listening competencies that are signature of high-quality academic discussions. The act of engaging peers and colleagues in a congenial discussion of a public artifact—be it verbal and in-person, written as a public review, or posted online as a digital comment—will prepare students for complex analytic and collaborative skills that will help them navigate adult interactions as professionals, citizens, and collaborators.

Implications

My vision for the Storyteller's LAW is that the approach could be applied across K–12 content areas—those other than Language Arts, like Social Studies or even Mathematics—to assist educators in capitalizing on informal entertainment media as a means to create engaging and productive learning experiences. The instructional strategies are designed with flexibility and, in theory, could be applied to other instructional settings that focus on different narratives (e.g., Robin Hood, *The Magic School Bus*, etc.) and media platforms (e.g., books, movies, websites, video games, etc.). It is important to retain the core integrity of each stage in the Storyteller's LAW, yet the sophistication and magnitude of the

implementation of the Storyteller's LAW would be best be left to the individual teachers' discretion. However, in order to become confirmed as a worthwhile educative undertaking, my vision requires more data and additional analyses. The data I present here do introduce a promising innovative instructional approach, yet there are some noteworthy limitations. Foremost is that, due to the small classroom sample size of *The Giver Project* and due to the variability across ways teachers implemented the four stages of the Storyteller's LAW, I have limited information upon which to analyze the utility of this instructional approach. To better understand 1) the socioacademic potential of the Storyteller's LAW and 2) students' and teachers' evaluations of the activities, I recommend conducting an implementation study across a larger and more diverse sample of teacher and students, and across a more diverse sample of media forums and stories.

This analysis presented in this paper also helped me to identify weaknesses in the stages of the Storyteller's LAW that could be improved for a future iteration. For example, following the Table Read, students would benefit from an additional step (perhaps called "The Pitch") where they present a rough draft of their presentation to a small audience or panel of judges to generate preliminary feedback that would be incorporated into a more polished version for the "Big Premiere." This process would allow students to practice peer review and revision process that can prepare them for college and/or the professional workforce, aka "the real world," as many of my own former teachers called adult life. Additionally, the overall flexibility of the resources required to implement the Storyteller's LAW in any given classroom must be clarified as more inclusive of the varying time and resources available to educators. For example, while The Big Premiere from *The Giver Project* describes theatrical performances presented by small groups of students to their whole class, the audience or public community of viewers for The Big Premiere in the Storyteller's LAW

could range from a single classroom to a whole-school population to a large body of online web-viewers who may or may not be anonymous. Further, the Critic's Choice *The Giver* example asks students to engage in a whole-class verbal discussion, yet different interpretations of the Storyteller's LAW could include Critic's Choice exercises that take the form of written feedback that is transmitted either on paper or electronic documents that are communicated to student writers either anonymously or with a specified identity.

Conclusion

When taking a step back from this deconstruction the Storyteller's LAW to consider the sequence of activities as a whole instructional approach, one can see that the Storyteller's LAW introduces opportunities for students to engage and collaborate with each other (dialogic instruction) with the goal of writing and publishing a creative extension of an existing narrative (fanfiction) that will be publically shared and evaluated by a community of peers (constructionism). This innovative approach is important in light of increasing use of new media for both entertainment and education uses in our culture. The onset of "new media," a term generally accepted as any digital content that can be located on the Internet (websites, blogs, social media sites, etc.), calls for K–12 classroom educators to adopt "new literacies," a term synonymous with "media literacies" or "digital literacies" to represent extended perceptions of literacy that include digital texts like websites, blogs, video games, social media sites, etc. (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). In particular, media literacy scholars (e.g., Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003) underscore how important it is for researchers and educators to respect adolescents' interests in media and popular culture, particularly the development of fanfiction, and to consider ways to capitalize upon these interests in academic settings.

Given that modern culture is focused on entertainment media (films, books, games, etc.), why not allow students to explore and extend these media in the classroom? What can research tell us about the impact of using these media in education settings? How can the increasing popularity of screen viewing, video gaming, blogging, and social-media trolling among today's youth, made possible in part through "easy access," affect curriculum and instruction? These questions would be productive for education researchers, instructional designers, and media producers to explore with the shared goal of capitalizing on youth's interests in entertainment media as ways to excite motivation for learning inside the classroom. As suggested by findings in the original *Giver Project*, and reexamined in this paper, the Storyteller's LAW extends the curriculum from simply a "crossmedia effort" to a "transmedia experience" for students; it gives students voice and agency to draw upon multiple forms of media in the design of their own learning environments. Enhanced fanfiction in middle school classrooms attends to students' sense of creativity and connects their personal interests to academic aims. In closing, I suggest that educators incorporate the Storyteller's LAW approach into their existing curricula, with care to include all creative, dialogic, and constructionist components of the experience.

Conclusion: Relevance of this Thesis & Next Steps

Media, Curricula, & Socioacademics

There are many viewpoints that an educator can take in response to the proliferation of new media to which today's teachers and students have access. One could opt to be a luddite who rejects the world of possibilities that are welcomed by new media, or one could be a mediaphile who embrace those possibilities as methods for improving teaching and learning. My urge is for educators to adopt the crossmedia approaches presented in this dissertation, or— at the least—be inspired by these approaches to draw upon storytelling and digital technology in ways that promote socioacademic competencies in youth. My prediction, which is supported by the findings in this dissertation, is that those classrooms who experiment with the Storyteller's LAW and similarly-designed crossmedia instruction will produce students who academically and socially outperform their peers in classrooms with less innovative approaches that rely on old media. I recommend that education researchers collaborate with teachers across K–12 grade levels, across all subject areas to empirically evaluate the academic and social outcomes associated with crossmedia socioacademic curricula.

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Appendix A — CODEBOOK by Activity Type

CURRICULM ACTIVITY BY TYPE & NUMBER		
CODE NAME	DESCRIPTION / FULL DEFINITION	EXAMPLE FROM THE DATA
WRITING ACTIVITIES		
Activity 1 A & B - Writing	<p>A. What are strategies that Lily and her classmates could have adopted to make the visitor feel more welcome and comfortable?</p> <p>B. Write a personal story about a time where you felt strange or foolish for not knowing the rules. How did others make you feel better... or worse?</p>	<p>112 - At the beginning, we had one, which was two parts, and two that were all focused on Lily and the stranger in the Community [Activity 1]. Which I got, because I understand its purpose. But we separated 1A and 1B, so then there were three assignments with Lily [Activity 1 A and B, and Activity 2], so the kids were like, “Another one?” You know what I mean?</p>
Activity 3 - Writing	Should volunteer work be required of youth in your community? Why? Justify your argument with logic or evidence.	<p>124 - Oh! “Should Volunteer Work Be Required” [Activity 3] was great! I really liked that one [Activity 3]. Because what I said was, “My opinion is that volunteer work should be required.” And they were like, “What!? What.” They could not... they did like that. And then, once we talked about it, I got some of them to think, “Yeah, actually, that might be a good idea.” I said, “Okay, then is it volunteering?” And we all agreed that it wasn’t. So we would say adults call it “volunteering,” but kids wouldn’t.</p>
Activity 4 - Writing	Leading up to the assignment ceremony, which character do you sympathize with the most? Why?	<p>111 - I was trying to think, how would I reword this [Activity 4] because they seemed to struggle with that “sympathize,” you know that... so I kind of did a little mini-lesson on empathy versus sympathy, and... but I had to give them, I had to scaffold it for them in order for them to be able to answer this.</p>
Activity 5 A & B - Writing	<p>A. Describe what each trait means to you and give examples of ways someone may demonstrate them.</p> <p>B. Rank order the most to least important of the character traits noted above. Justify</p>	<p>347 - If there’s a way that maybe we could, I maybe would pull it back into the books, like, “Let’s look and see a time that Jonas acted with integrity [Activity 5]. Let’s look and find a time where, you know, and what would that look like then, in our</p>

	why you view some traits are more valuable than others.	school.” And have a conversation around it that way - I think would help.
Activity 8 A & B - Writing	A. Why does Jonas react this way? Support your answer with details from the book. B. Do you believe it is okay for children in your world to “play” war? Why? And, how do you feel about other media (video games, music videos, etc.) that portray violence?	124 - I saw their eyes light up when Jonas went through that war scene in the book, and then they thought about video games [Activity 8]. They were like, “It’s not the same.” And I said, “How is it not the same? What’s different about it?” And we actually got to this point where it wasn’t and maybe kids shouldn’t play violent video games. So it was really cool. I really liked that one, Number 8 was really fun.
Activity 12 A & B - Writing	A. Now that you’ve read the story, do Jonas’s rules make sense? Support your answer with details from the book. B. What changes would you make to the rules? Explain why.	124 - “Changing the rules” [Activity 12], they were kind of, “Eh” about that. I thought they’d have more fun with it.
PERSPECTIVE TAKING MEASURES (PTM)		
Activity 2 - PTM	PTM - Jariah's funny hair and music (aligned w/ Lily's new kid dilemma).	123 - It was two written assignments that were really similar [Activity 2 and Activity 7]. Similar questions, and I had a lot of, “Didn’t we already do this one?” I was like, “No, it’s a different character, a different situation but similar questions.”
Activity 7 - PTM	PTM - Finley's ratty shoes.	235 - I don’t think it’s deep enough for them to really... I think they think it’s boring. And contrived.
INTERACTIVE Any discussion, debate, acting, and other collaborative activity.		
<i>DISCUSSION & DEBATE</i>		
Activity 6 - Debate	Imagine a society that requires everyone to wear a lie detector device at all times. If the detector found out that someone had lied, the	124 - They liked doing it, they liked fighting for the other [side], putting themselves on the other side. After they grumbled about it, they liked it afterward. So that was kind of cool; that was fun.

	information would go to the authorities (teachers, police, or judges). Is this a good idea?	This was a really, really fun one. It went far better than I thought it was going to go.
Activity 10 & 11 - Writing & Debate	<p>10. When Rosemary requested her own release, was this suicide? Please explain your thinking.</p> <p>11. When Rosemary requested her own release, was this suicide?</p>	112 - 112 - However, it was interesting to see the gravity and lack of gravity in some kids. Some kids were making jokes about it, like, “Oh, If I was in that situation I’d totally release myself! I’d just be like, oh, release!” That kind of thing. And then there’s the kids who took it really intensely and were like, “So she chose to end her life” and really looked at what that means in the long run [Activity 10 and Activity 11].
<i>SCRIPT WRITING & ROLE-PLAYING</i>		
Activity 9 - Acting	<p>Jonas decides to secretly stop taking his medicine... Next, Jonas convinces Fiona to also stop taking her medicine.</p> <p>Group students in pairs and ask them to role-play the scene described above... ask some pairs to volunteer to act the scene out for the class.</p>	123 - The favorite activities were when they got a chance to act, the little scene that they did [Activity 9] and then when they wrote their own scene and they did it – they loved those [Activity 13].
Activity 13 - Script Writing	Use your imagination to write a scene of the story that shows how Jonas approaches his father about the release.	347 - I think the students really enjoyed the writing activity where they wrote their scenes and then they got to act them out [Activity 13 and Activity 14]. That was really great, for them to brainstorm and think about, “What would be a likely character motivation or a reaction with what I know about this character?”
Activity 14 A B & C - Acting	<p>A. In small groups, students share their new story scene.</p> <p>B. In their small groups, give students 10 minutes to synthesize their ideas and develop a collaborative scene from the story that depicts Jonas’ reaction to Father.</p> <p>C. After each group has acted out their scene, engage students in a whole class discussion about the different reactions Jonas may have had.</p>	124 - I made up this paper where they had to say three things everyone did and three things everyone didn’t do that you wanted to include [Activity 13 and Activity 14]. They had to include everything that everyone included. So, for example, everybody included a fight, so there had to be a fight in your scene.

Activity 15 - Write an ending to the scene above. Given his
Script new introduction to the concept of
Writing love, how would Jonas reply to the Giver?

111 - I loved this activity [Activity 15]. I loved having them write scripts. They loved it. They really enjoyed it. I was very explicit about, it can't be like, "I love you too man." And so they, they... they did a nice job with that.

Paper 1, Appendix B — CODEBOOK of Teachers' Rationales for Evaluating the Curriculum

TEACHER CRITIQUE OF THE CURRICULUM		
CODE NAME	CODE DESCRIPTION	CODE EXAMPLE
<p>POSITIVE EVALUATION</p> <p>Over all, the teacher speaks favorably of the activity. She indicates that she would likely be willing to use it again, or that over it was worthwhile for some social or academic purpose. To be coded as this, it is okay if the teacher had some negative critique, as long as her predominant attitude is positive. *Try to only code the sentence or excerpt that directly declares the teacher's overall assessment / sentiment of the activity.</p> <p>Below are codes to explain why or what aspects of the activity the teacher favored. Code any statements that clearly describe pro-sentiment w/ these. Multiple codes can be applied.</p>		
ACADEMIC BENEFIT	Teacher cites an academic or education related benefit or effect of the activity (e.g., content comprehension, articulation of arguments, writing improvement, ELL involvement, critical thinking, providing evidence, using counter-examples, etc.).	347 - They have to think about character motivations and there's character analysis in it, so they have to think about, why would a character do this. And this flows into settings. They have to consider setting, which we've been talking about a lot in our class... There's speaking and listening objectives that they're meeting. Using their voice to show emotion, that was one of our objectives one of our days.
SOCIAL BENEFIT	Teacher cites a social or classroom-climate related benefit or effect of the activity (e.g., perspective taking, kindness, friendships, peer trust, peer collaboration, etc.).	347 - I think it really make them feel confident with one another. It set the tone nicely... You know, we just kinda sat back. They know to call on peers and know to build off of one another's ideas and know what they wanna [inaudible]. It really set the tone for me moving on, now the kids already feel comfortable being in front of one another or sharing their thoughts that way.
STUDENT ENJOYMENT	For whatever reason, the teacher says that her students enjoyed the activity or had fun completing it.	123 - When they wrote it out and acted it out, they loved the time to write it out [Activity 13]. And then, of course, the one girl wrote a full thing. I was like, "How did you do this?" This whole play came out! But they were all on the same page, is what was interesting.

SCHOOL MISSION	Teacher notes that the activity attends to her school's greater curricular efforts or education policy.	112 - And that really tied in well with our [school's] “decision making” and “supporting your ideas” and all of that.
EASY TO TEACH	Teacher praises the activity as easy to teach, requiring minimal effort, or causing minimal stress to her workload.	124 - But I pretty much liked anything with acting [Activity 9 and Activity 13]. I liked anything that involved them, something that they could connect to their own life, that was really easy to teach, so those were fun.
CONNECTED TO REAL LIFE	Teacher notes that the activity was enjoyable (for her or her students) because the students were able to make connections between the content and their social realities.	235 - They liked that to be a debate because there is community service, then there's volunteer work... there are the different ways that we put it out. It is ironic, the way we actually in our school make kids do community service. But we don't call it volunteering. [Laughter.] They had to clean the deck of the battleship last year.
CODE NAME	CODE DESCRIPTION	CODE EXAMPLE
NEGATIVE EVALUATION		
Overall, the teacher speaks negatively about the activity. She indicates that she would not likely use it in future classes. She either did not teach it or did not have a good experience with it during the project. To be coded as this, it is okay if the teacher had some positive comments, as long as her predominant attitude is against the activity.		
Below are codes to explain why or what aspects of the activity did the teacher not favor. Code any statements that clearly describe anti-sentiment w/these. Multiple codes can be applied.		
STUDENT DISCONTENTMENT	For whatever reason, the teacher says that her students did not like the activity.	235 - Yeah, and a lot of my students just didn't like it. They said, “Yeah, we know what you want me to say.” It's like the students can either tell us what we want to hear, or sound like a psycho killer or a bully—even if they are not a bully—they didn't want to go there.
SENSITIVE SUBJECT	Teacher expresses discomfort in the content or topic and cites this discomfort (for whatever reason it may be) as a rationale for why she did not like or did not teach the lesson.	347 - I know this book is about coming of age and realizing the reality of the world. Some students made that leap automatically about what release was, and when Rosemary elected to be released, some students made that connection. But not all of them did and I

		didn't necessarily want to have them grow up sooner than they need to just yet.
INSUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE	Teacher notes that her students lacked the background knowledge, vocabulary, or content comprehension to adequately understand, participate in, or enjoy the activity.	347 - I think that was probably the hardest for them to do [Activity 5], cause maybe they weren't familiar with the traits. And so to try to think about, "I don't actually have a full understanding of what integrity is, so how do I decide how it ranks? Maybe it's really important and I don't understand it completely." I think that might've been what was the challenge for them.
REQUIRED PREPARATION	Teacher laments that the activity caused (or would cause) her to spend too much time preparing the students to engage in the activity (requiring her to extend explanations for how to engage in the activity or scaffold students with additional background knowledge to fully comprehend the activity's purpose).	124 - I had to do a lot of prep work of what a debate look like? What kind of rules are there during a debate? It's not a screaming match. It's actually very logical and very one step at a time. So we went through all the steps. I printed the steps for them...So then I had to take a whole class period for them to create, with their team, their points.
LACKS A PURPOSE OR RATIONALE	Teacher cites that the activity lacked a clear purpose or rationale and that this may have hindered her ability or willingness to teach it - or hampered her overall view of the activity.	111 - I would appreciate if each thing had rationale down here. What were you [the curriculum writers] thinking? Why did you have us asking this question instead of another question? What was the rationale, and not to share with students, just so teachers know. ... I didn't feel I had enough information to tie this activity to the collegial discussion that I thought maybe you wanted because it was one of the standards that you listed.
TIMING IS OFF	The lesson or activity did not make sense to the teacher or students because it was poorly timed in regards to sequence in the story, curriculum, or other instructional reasons. Basically, teacher thinks the lesson should come at a different point in the curriculum, for whatever reason.	111 - By lesson ten, we're in chapter eighteen. Chapter eighteen does not address release yet...They didn't know what release was yet. They, it doesn't come until chapter nineteen. So it needs to be after. It's a good lesson, it's a good lesson and it needs to be completed after nineteen instead of eighteen.
DISCONNECTED FROM REAL LIFE	Teacher notes that the activity was not enjoyable (for her or her students) because the students had	235 - ...plus it was something that did not really relate to my sixth graders... didn't really relate to them have

	difficulty making connections between the content and their real lives, OR that the lesson felt too phony / fake/ contrived.	a problem with a kid who broke the rules. Lily is little, and my students are more interested in the stirrings. [Laughter.] It would be better to find a place that highlights the older characters.
MISC		
These are codes to explain other noteworthy comments made by the teacher that are not bucketed in the other code categories. Multiple codes can be applied.		
CODE NAME	CODE DESCRIPTION	CODE EXAMPLE
MEDIA CONNECTION	The teacher describes how she made a connection between the book and movie (or other supplemental media), or how the relationships between these media could be enhanced in the future. *The purpose of this code is to help identify ways that films can be better used in a curriculum.	111 - Now we went out and bought the movie so that we could show the clips, which was fine... And we both said, had we not shown the clip, this kind of just really, like without the clip, would have had no meaning.
FUTURE MODIFICATION	The teacher offers a suggestion for how to modify an activity or enhance the curriculum in the future - she did not enact this modification during the study's implementation.	347 - I wouldn't use as many of the writing prompts [Activity: Personal Writing Prompts]. The way I did it, basically, is the writing prompts were for homework and then we did a lot of guided book discussions.
PRESENT MODIFICATION	The teacher offers a description for how she modified an existing activity or enhanced the curriculum (by adding a completely new lesson or significantly adjusting a current one) during project implementation.	124 - So I created a planning guide, so they had to decide whether he was better or worse [Activity 16]. Then I wrote, "At the beginning, Jonas thought BLANK, but now he thinks THIS." "At the beginning, Jonas would do THIS, but now he'll do THIS." So I said, "thought," "did," and "said." So you had to think, what makes you right? At the beginning, Jonas would play war, but at the end he would not, and that makes him a better person. Or, that makes him a worse person. Then they had to pick five examples from the book, with a page number, to include in this. And it's a full page of writing that we asked them to do.

Appendix C — Students' Writing, Activity #3

ACTIVITY #3—The youth in Jonas's Community are *required* to do a certain amount of *volunteer* work. This is ironic. **Should volunteer work be required of youth in your community?** Why? Justify your argument with logic or evidence.

1. MRS. WELLS' STUDENTS AT COASTAL PINES ACADEMY

Giver Number: 235302

Yes I think that youth should be required to work in their community because it is good for them to give back to their community and it helps the youth become better people.

2. MS. O'HARA'S STUDENT AT HAMILTON MIDDLE SCHOOL

Giver Number: 347105

Remember to PEE on your paper.

Point, Evidence, Explanation.

I think kids should For example.... This shows that...

Another reason is... In other words....

My final reason is... This is important because....

I think that in a community volunteer work of youth should not be required, but should be encouraged. For example not all kids would want to be required to go to volunteer work and there will be a big uproar from all the kids in that community. This shows that not all kids support all charities and volunteer work so when it becomes required kids will be in uproar. Another reason volunteer work of youth should not be required is that most kids don't have time for volunteer work with all their homework and school, volunteer work is one more thing to add to their list. In other words kids have too much to do, so they will not be happy if they are required to do a certain amount of volunteer work. My final reason is that kids can do what they want to do and if that means not doing volunteer work then that is their choice. Volunteer work should be encouraged because volunteer work is always a great thing to do for the community and it is always important. This is true because whenever you help or volunteer, you are helping your community. This is important because kids have to lead their own future and live their lives without anyone getting in their way! That is why I think volunteer work of youth should not be required, but it should be encouraged in a community.

3. MS. WELLS' STUDENT AT ANGELS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Giver Number: 124205

Required- someone in authority instructs or expects someone to do something

Volunteer- freely offer to do something

Ironic- happening in the opposite way to what is expected

Use the space below to write your two paragraphs. Please check for spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

I don't think you should have to volunteer. That is why it is called volunteering. I think it is good to volunteer but you shouldn't have to. Most people have other thing to do too. Maybe a certain age should have to volunteer. Plus eight year olds shouldn't have to volunteer. If they want they can, but they shouldn't have to.

I think it is dumb that you have to get a certain amount of hours to get a job. I think it is a good idea if you volunteer it could benefit you later in the future. Also people can't make you volunteer. If you don't get a job for not volunteering is a very bad idea. That is my opinion on volunteering.

3. MRS. GREENE'S STUDENT AT ROOSEVELT MIDDLE SCHOOL

Giver Number: 346102

Giver Number: 346102 Name: _____

The youth in Jonas's Community are *required* to do a certain amount of *volunteer* work. This is ironic.

WRITE YOUR RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION BELOW

Should volunteer work be required of youth in your community? Why? Justify your argument with logic or evidence.

I think volunteer work should be in schools because it helps students to get ready for their real jobs. Also it helps students have a good feeling when they help someone. One more thing is it can be fun. That is why I think community work should be in schools.

4. MRS. FRANCO'S STUDENT AT ROCKY CREEK MIDDLE SCHOOL
Giver Number: 111310

Giver ID: 111310

Lesson 3

The youth in Jonas' community are *required* to do a certain amount of volunteer work. This is ironic.

Should volunteer work be required of youth in *your* community? Why or Why not? Justify your argument with logic or evidence.

Well, I think volunteer work should be required. I am gonna give you reasons why. First of all if you volunteer you get to help other people. Second of all you might feel good about yourself when you help. And last you might learn new stuff of the work you do. So yeah this is why I think volunteering work should be required. it would help kid's alot learning new stuff. So these were my reasons.

This is support for the reason.

*what kind of "stuff"?
Needs more support here.*

	3	2	1	0
Topic sentence		✓		
2 or 3 reasons given	✓			
Explanation given for each reason			✓	
Concluding sentence		✓		

Total Points 8 / 10 **B**

5. MRS. LEVINE'S STUDENT AT ROCKY CREEK MIDDLE SCHOOL
Giver Number: 112107

Giver ID: 112107

Lesson 3

The youth in Jonas' community are *required* to do a certain amount of volunteer work. This is ironic.

Should volunteer work be required of youth in *your* community? Why or Why not? Justify your argument with logic or evidence.

No I don't think that volunteering hours should not be required to the youth in my community. First I help out my grandma out alot. When I out I vacuum up the house, cook her lunch, and clean. I help her out alot. Second at this young age we want to play sports and stuff. Like my sister is in a chess club, I play soccer. That takes alot of my time up. Last is that kids are kids. 14 and under you want to play with friends and worse case scenario. you volunteer and do it wrong. Plus most high schools allow you to do a certain number of volunteering hours. So that is why I think youth in my community shouldn't have to do volunteering hours.

	3	2	1	0
Topic sentence				
2 or 3 reasons given				
Explanation given for each reason				
Concluding sentence				

Total Points _____ / 10

6. MRS. THOMAS' STUDENT AT CEDERLAND MIDDLE-HIGH SCHOOL

Giver Number: 123112

No, I do not think that volunteer work should be required in our community. I think this because volunteer work is something that you volunteer for, not be forced to do. If you get forced to volunteer, it's not volunteering. That would be more like being forced to work and not get paid. When you volunteer it is because you want to help out and you do it for free, but only because you want to.

The Giver 3E Curriculum: A Study of Ethics, Education, and Entertainment

Participant Recruitment

Dear Schools and Families:

We are researchers from the Harvard Graduate School of Education who are interested in working with local educators (school districts or homeschool families) to help us better understand how books and movies can be used to promote students' academic and social development. This research is funded by The Anschutz Family Foundation, a charitable not for profit foundation, associated with the production of the upcoming motion picture *The Giver*.

Over the past year, our team of educators and researchers has worked to develop educational curricula to be used with classic fictional stories that have been made into movies. **Our curriculum is based upon evidence as to what promotes strong academic abilities like reading comprehension and critical thinking, as well as healthy prosocial abilities like perspective taking and empathy.**

We are looking for classroom teachers or homeschool families with children in the range of grades 5–8, to participate in our small study. Our goal is to partner with educators as they teach both the book and the film of *The Giver*, a classic story by Lois Lowry, during their regularly scheduled class time. The study will take place during 2014-2015 academic year and is anticipated to last approximately six weeks. Before implementation, during the spring and summer of 2014, we are happy to work with educators to develop a plan that best accommodates their unique classroom needs and instructional timeline. During the project, participating classroom teachers (or homeschool family units) will be provided with all necessary curricular materials and instructional support, and at the conclusion of the project each will be thanked with a \$350 check.

If you are interested in participating in our study or have questions, please email us at the addresses listed below. **And please spread the word – we welcome you to forward this message on to others whom you believe would be a good fit for our project!**

We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Robert L. Selman
robert_selman@gse.harvard.edu
tracy_elizabeth@mail.harvard.edu

Tracy Elizabeth

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR THE GIVER PROJECT

Some basic guidelines:

- ✓ This interview is scheduled to last approximately 30 minutes; please be sensitive of the teacher's time and attempt to conclude near this time.
- ✓ The interview is designed to be flexible so that the teacher feels comfortable talking about what she deems most important or relevant to her analysis of the curriculum.
- ✓ Provide the teacher with a printed copy of *The Giver Educator's Resource*. Use this document as a guide to discuss each curricular activity.
- ✓ Bring your own copy of *The Giver Educator's Resource* with you to the interview.
- ✓ For clarity, and future ease of analysis, please try to refer to the activity number when discussing it. For example, if a teacher says, "I liked this one," try to repeat back a clarifying question like, "Activity Number 7?" to confirm.
- ✓ The primary goal of this interview is to generate a better understanding of the teacher's perceptions on the following: *Strengths of the Curriculum*, *Challenges Posed by the Curriculum*, and *Modifications for the Curriculum*.

STEP 1 — Begin the interview by posing the following statement: *"We view you as a teacher expert and consultant for our curriculum efforts. Based on your experience teaching The Giver Educator's Resource in your classroom, we wonder: Of these curricular activities, which did you prefer over others?" and "What modifications did you make and why? We will look through the curriculum together to talk about the activities.*

STEP 2 = Give the teacher a copy of the curriculum, and open your own document. Point to Activity 1 and ask: *What did you think about this one?*

Use additional open-ended questions to encourage the teacher to elaborate upon her ideas. Some suggestions are:

- Why do you say that?
- Can you offer an example?
- That's interesting. Can you please say a little more?

If you find the conversation straying from the primary topic, use questions like the ones listed below to get back on track:

- Would you teach this activity again?
- Did you change modify this activity at all? How so? Why?
- What were your impressions of this one?

STEP 3 = Before concluding the interview, be sure to ask: *Is there anything else that you would like to say about the curriculum or the implementation experience that you have not yet had a chance to share?*

Appendix F — Rater Reliability for Teacher Rationales

Kappa Coefficients for Inter-rater Agreement on Teachers' Rationales for Evaluating Curricular Activities

CODE	Kappa
Rationales that tended to accompany positive evaluations:	
STUDENT ENJOYMENT	0.91
ACADEMIC BENEFIT	0.91
CONNECTED TO REAL LIFE	0.94
SOCIAL BENEFIT	0.94
SCHOOL MISSION	1.00
EASY TO TEACH	1.00
Rationales that tended to accompany negative evaluations:	
STUDENT DISCONTENTMENT	0.78
SENSITIVE SUBJECT	0.84
INSUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE	0.88
LACKS PURPOSE OR RATIONALE	0.93
DISCONNECTED FROM REAL LIFE	1.00
REQUIRED PREPARATION	1.00
TIMING IS OFF	1.00
Rationales that were neutral, yet highlighted mixed media use:	
MEDIA CONNECTION	0.95
POOLED KAPPA	0.92